



RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 02

Er Mu

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Release That Witch

(放开那个女巫)

by

Er Mu

(二目)

Synopsis

Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

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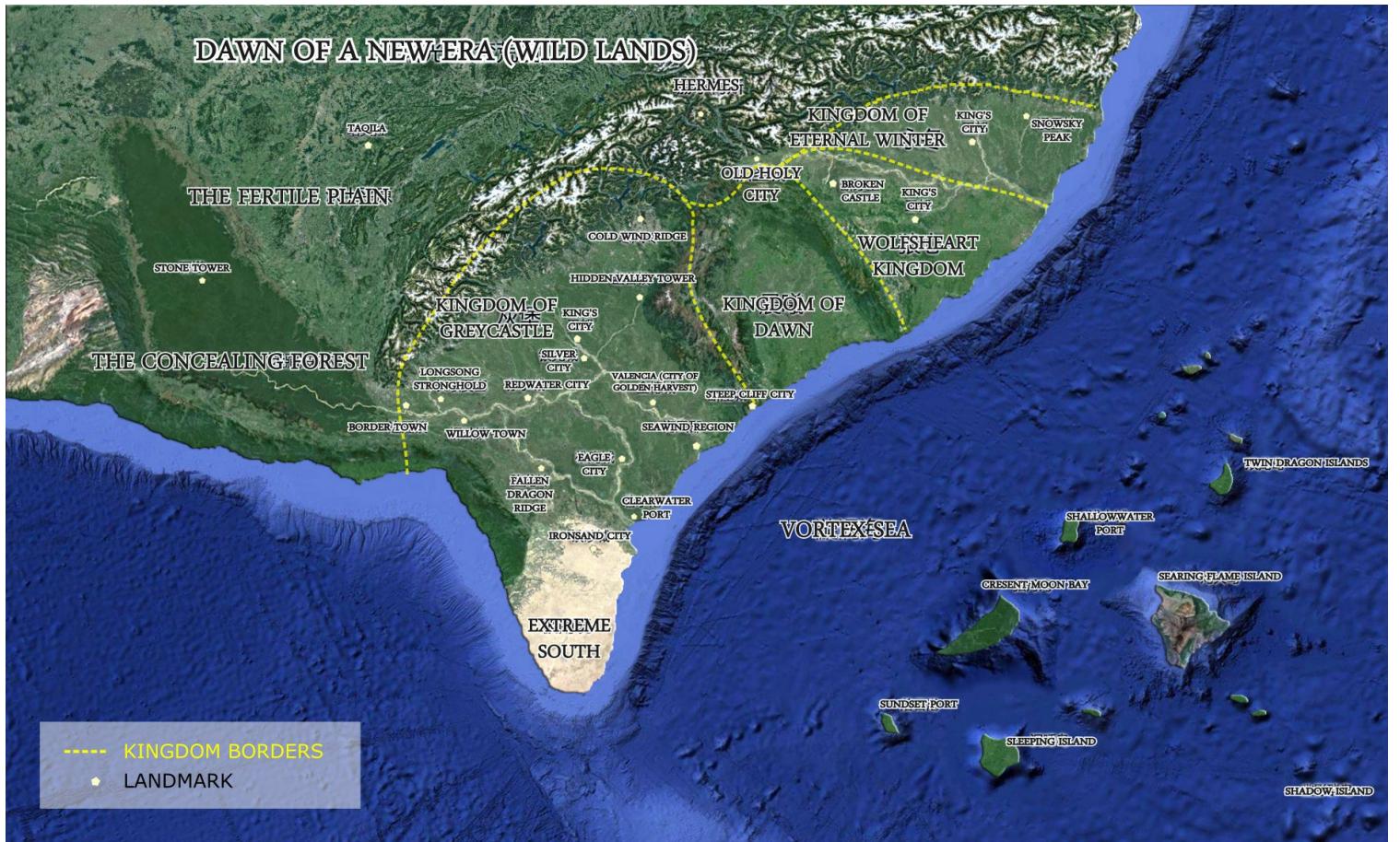
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3rd Saga - War Is Everywhere

Chapter 101 - The Ancient Book And The Traces It Gives (Part 2)

What does this mean? Roland rubbed his fingers over the handwritten line, had the original owner of this ancient book also had to fight against those monsters in the wild lands? He turned his view further down and continued reading –

“The Devils grew each day in number, but every day we became less.”

“God’s Stone of Retaliation was also unable to stop them. It would only work against their unparalleled strange powers, but even without relying on their magic, they were still fierce and terrible enemies.”

“The Holy City of Taquila has already fallen into the enemy’s hands, the only option left to us was to scatter in all directions.”

“Over the mountains, across the rivers. Trying to flee as far away from the Gates of Hell as possible.”

“But for the next time, where to should we flee?”

“But, this isn’t something I have to think about. I am going to die, Natalia.”

“The Devil’s power is corroding my body, and every one of our

drugss are losing its effect.”

“I’m writing all this down because I have a simple matter I want to request of you to do for me.”

Alice’s test of the God’s Punishment Army is already approaching its end, and the test was a success. Even when facing the extraordinary Devil Warriors they have nothing to fear, but she forgot the important point, even if the God’s Punishment Army will win, this victory won’t belong to us.”

” That’s right. The God’s Punishment Army, will lead to our end.

”

“To stop her, only you are left.”

The text he managed to read wasn’t long, Roland swept his gaze once more from beginning to end. He then closed his eyes and began to think about what he had read. Trying to see it from Cara’s perspective.

Assuming that she wasn’t aware of the existence of the Devil’s. And she thought the Devil to refer to a witch. Using this assumption, it would be easy to imagine that the book was written from the perspective of a member of the Church, fleeing from the witches. Then, combined with widely circulated rumors – after all, the rumours say that the witches are all the Devil’s minions, and that they gained their magic from the Gate of Hell.

Cara most likely thought that the Church actually wanted to hide the truth: That they changed the entry to the Holy Mountain to the Gate of Hell, and that for several hundreds of years, witches already had access to the Holy Mountain, and that they found there an eternal life. So the witches became more and more, yet the warriors of the Church became less and less.

Of course, this theory had many holes to it. For example, the author of the text said that, the other side possessed strange powers when compared to ordinary people, clearly there were no witches who possessed these characteristics. Another example was that even under the suppression of the God's Stone of Retaliation, the witches were still able to let the church suffer a crushing defeat, which seemed too bizarre. So in the end, the reason why Cara went on the journey to the wild lands, was still unknown. Maybe she had just been so eager that she didn't realize that it had already affected her judgment. There was still some content that he wasn't able to understand, maybe the real cause stood therein?

Roland preferred the latter possibility.

At least he knew now, that the Devil that was described on the last page wasn't a witch, but was the description of the real alien race.

But all this didn't reduce his doubts, instead it only increased his already numerous problems.

In the end, since when was the Church fighting against the Devils?

Even so, again and again Roland went through the content of the book, but he was still unable to find the relevant content. The Church had established their base in the North, since the end of the war of faith. The base was built to defend against the huge gap in the Impassable Mountain Range against the demonic beasts. Later, they simply built a fortress on the plateau of the Hermes, and simply called it the New Holy City. These two cities are now connected together, one on the high ground and the other was low lying, but both were used to withstand the demonic beasts attack and not the Devils. Besides, he had never heard of a place called Taquila.

If all of this was true, the Church would have no reason to hide it. According to church's history books, they were always able to resist the attacks from the demonic beasts, and were also able to achieve great victories in their battle against the witches. This was all described in great detail as if they feared that anyone would forget of their great merits.

But compared with the confrontation against the Devils, how can they still treat the matter of the demonic beasts and the witches to be more worthy to particularize?

The last question concerned the God's Punishment Army.

Evidently this member of the Church didn't want to see the God's Punishment Army to appear, furthermore, they even entrusted others to stop the person in charge of the experiment. Apparently, they seemed to have succeeded? Roland only knew that the Church had an Army of Judges, but he had never heard of the God's

Punishment Army – of course, that doesn't rule out that the former 4th Prince was simply just ignorant.

However, if they really could foster warrior strong enough to fight against the Devils, wouldn't it just increase the power of the Church? So why would the author of the note write that it would cause their destruction?

The place where they found this book, should have additional information.

"It was Cara who found the book. Do you know where she found it?" Roland raised his head and asked Nightingale.

"When I joined the Witch Cooperation Association, the sisterhood had already set foot on the road towards the Holy Mountain." Nightingale who was still chewing the dried fish, answered absently.

"But Wendy had mentioned, that at the beginning the sisterhood didn't call themselves the Witch Cooperation Association, they were just a couple of witches from the Sea Wind Region. Also among them were Cara, Wendy and Scroll. Afterwards when they left the Sea Wind Region, they found a secret meeting place within a forest. But no one had expected that there would actually be a secret entry to an ancient ruin hidden there."

She took another bite from her snack, licked her lips and then continued, "But except for Cara, no one else had went down to explore it."

“Did she find the ancient book within the ruins?

“At least, that’s what Cara said,” Nightingale curled her lips.

“And later then, they began to gather more and more witches. But it seems that their hiding place accidentally got leaked to the Church, which later then brought a large army to surround the meeting place. Only twenty witches were able to escape, which was less than half of them. It was then that Cara decided to search for the Holy Mountain. So they established the Witch Cooperation Association, with the goal of finding the Holy Mountain as their highest priority.”

After hearing this story, he once more began to think about it, to study mysteries while knowing so little was just too inconvenient, even more so when it was history mixed with legends, leaving a blank in his mind. The ancient book didn’t mentioned the year that it was written, and there was also no other big war mentioned in other history books he had read.

The first person involved in discovering it was already dead, but maybe we can go to find the ancient ruin ourselves, he thought.

But to Roland it was also clear that it was basically an impossible task. The forest in the east was just too far away from Border Town, it was much more than just a short walk, it was a journey across the whole Kingdom of Greycastle. But at this moment the development of his territory was his highest priority.

Roland stood up and walked to the window, there he had a perfect view over the back gardens. In the garden, the witches were training according to his training program. Now that his group of witches had grown to twelve, it was finally time to set up an organization.

In his conception, the organization didn't need any program or guideline. It was just designed to facilitate the management of the witches and the ability they were able to wield, its function would be similar to the future generation of industrial associations.

The rules of the organizations would also be as simple as possible, there would only be two rules: Do not take advantage of your ability to violate the law of the territory. And, it is forbidden to use your ability to evade the law.

At the beginning Roland wanted to use the three laws of robotics, restricting the ability of the witches by not allowing them to injure or attack ordinary people and so on, but then he thought that it would actually be unnecessary. Their ability was just the same as guns. When confronted with hazards, there was really no difference between using a gun or a witch's ability to defend themselves. And by deliberately stressing the difference between witches and ordinary people, the gap between these two groups would only grow further apart.

So it wouldn't become illegal, he couldn't avoid his responsibility as a scientist and engineering dog, he had to express himself in the most concise way.

As for the name of this organization, Roland had already long ago

found a good one.

The name of the new collective will be “Witch Union.”

Chapter 102 - The Honeysuckle And The Elk Families (Part 1)

After nightfall, the Elk Manson was brightly lit, while holding his invitation, Petrov was welcomed into the hall. The banquet to celebrate the birthday of the 3rd young lady of the Elk family, Aurelia had just begun.

Only people with a prestigious or aristocratic background in Longsong Stronghold were allowed to attend the banquet. As for the Count himself, the birthday banquet was also very important. A woolen carpet was spread throughout the whole hall and all the chamberlains wore a custom-made uniform so that they would easily be recognized. After all, it was Aurelia's sixteens birthday, which means that she reached the marriageable age.

String music sounded throughout the hall, and attendants were walking in the crowd and handing out glasses of wine. The steaming food was placed on circular tables which were spread within the hall. Aurelia, the protagonist of the birthday banquet was wearing a canary dress and stood in a corner of the hall surrounded by a group of friends, seeming to be having a very lively chat with them.

This was a new popular trend to celebrate, directly coming from the King's city. Previously the banquets were held like this: Usually, there was a long wooden table placed in the hall and all the guests were sitting at the table, waiting for the chef to serve the meal. Then huge bowls with pork and whole chickens was served with butter and bread. In addition, there was also double-sided fried eggs served together with a large pot of lettuce leaves.

But some years ago the king came up with a new way to celebrate and today this was now a mimic of the new style but only in form.

For example, the glasses given out were all made of different colors, instead of the normally transparent glasses. Within them, the wine was unable to bring out its mellow color. The circular tables are also covered with white tablecloths, rather than the greasy tablecloths they had used. As for the cooked food, the Elk family was still serving the old western style – very greasy and coarse. Seeing this, Petrov shook his head, the cook could at least have cut the meat into several small pieces.

As usual, Petrov had already filled his stomach at home in advance, since he didn't want to cut the big pieces of meat like a surgeon. He was invited to this birthday party as the representative of his family, so he had to eat at least a mouthful of this oily food, even if it was only to save face. After all, Petrov didn't want to become a joke for the ladies.

“Long time no see, man,” Suddenly his neck was hooked by someone from behind,

“I heard you've been appointed as the Duke's messenger? How was the harvest of ore in Border Town. Were you able to steal a lot from them?

Hearing this familiar voice, Petrov immediately knew that it was Rene, the second son of the Elk Family, who was bent on becoming a knight, even though there wasn't any territory for him to

manage, such an idiot. As a friend, Rene would count as “not bad,” but Petrov still didn’t want to speak about what he had encountered in Border Town. So he changed the topic, “Shouldn’t you be in the camp at the Cold Wind Mountain Range at this moment? I thought you were sitting in a tavern and trembling.”

“Damn,” Rene pushed Petrov away, “it seems your mouth is unable to speak a single word of praise. This time, I wasn’t even able to enter the New Holy City. The day before the departure for the border guard, I got infected with a cold and had to lie for a whole week in bed.

“Good, you seem to have improved compared to the last time, but skipping the journey saved the guards a lot of inconvenience.”

“This time you’re wrong,” Rene said suddenly, while a mysterious smile spread over his face. “If I hadn’t been lying in bed for a week because of the cold, I’d now be lying on the icy walls of the New Holy City forever.”

“What do you mean?” Petrov raised his eyebrows in confusion.

“Listen, I have something to tell you,” Rene the second son of the Elk family came close to Petrov’s ear and whispered, “The New Holy City almost fell, the demonic beasts were even able to rush into the inner city, if not for the church’s timing to release their strongest warriors, they would have been unable to hold the city. But during the fight, the armies of the four kingdoms had suffered heavy losses, only a few soldiers of the Cold Wind Mountain Range were able to come back alive. In just a month, there are many wives who had become widows, without any savings...” He winked

his eyes, then stretched out two fingers, “and now they will get two silver royals as compensation. Hey, don’t use that look on me, I can’t do anything about it.”

“Are you sure this news is true? What happen to the border guards?”

“Of course, I’ve seen it with my own eyes, when the Lord received the news he fell ill.” Rene shrugged, “As for the guards... What else could they do, instead of slowly recruiting new guards. Now the North is desperately in need of experienced soldiers, if not for my call to come home, I would be commanding a cavalry squad right now.”

That isn’t the important point, Petrov thought to himself, the border guards from the Cold Wind Mountain Range was also the primary defense against the Church’s Army of Judges, now the generals and soldiers of the four kingdom are buried at the Hermes, if that doesn’t taste a little bit of a conspiracy, then I don’t know what does. If they plotted to attack us, the North of the Kingdom of Graycastle which is now like a nearly stripped-bare woman, “How many soldiers are lost in the Army of Judges?”

“They didn’t fare much better than the other four armies, think about it, they always rush to the front like fanatics. On the other hand, if the Army of Judges didn’t attack, the soldiers of the other four kingdoms certainly wouldn’t have moved,” Rene said in disdain. “Knights shouldn’t be like this, always speaking about honor, but when they have to confront demonic beasts, shrinking back like little girls.”

“You mean knights like the one in front of me now?” Perot smiled, perhaps I’m just thinking too much into this. Even if the Church wants to start a war against the North, it will have nothing to do with us here in Longsong Stronghold. Should the new king get headaches from thinking about this.

“Unfortunately, until now, no one has accepted my allegiance, or, perhaps they just don’t have the qualification to take me in,” Rene paused, looked towards the door, “The people of the Wolf Family have come, I’m just going to greet them, and then I’ll come back.”

“Go, but don’t come back.”

“Oh, that’s right,” Rene retorted as he looked back. “Have you noticed the handkerchief in the invitation?”

“Were you the one that put it in?” Petrov asked.

“Oh, if it was me, I’d only have given you some two day’s old socks,” Rene shook his finger, “That, was my youngers sister’s personal decision. Although the age gap is rather big, but as long as you have the intention; I can only say that you shouldn’t wait my friend. After all, you’re already twenty-two years old by now.”

Petrov gave him a dirty look, but Rene just whistled innocently, then turned around and laughingly went away.

After taking a glass of wine from an attendant, Petrov strolled by

himself to the corner, while quietly looking through the lively hall. He noticed that Aurelia was still busy talking lively with her friends. But at the very same time as himself, she also took a secret look at himself, so that for a short moment, their eyes met. But immediately afterwards Petrov saw that Aurelia quickly changed her line of sight and on her cheeks emerged a touch of red of embarrassment.

Petrov in return just smiled kindly. In his view, the other was just a little girl.

All of a sudden, the sounds of a fierce discussion came from the other side of the hall, attracting the eyes of all the people present.

“What! He dared to say that?”

“Yes. Cornelius, that coward, unexpectedly didn’t even dare to let out a fart, he just came back with his tail between his legs,” said the man with the loudest voice, “Shaming the whole of Longsong Stronghold!”

Petrov knew the man, if he remembered correctly he was called Simon Elliott, a member of the Wolf Branch Family, who was also married to a very pretty woman. Petrov had seen the woman once, she really was charming.

“It seems as if you have a way to solve the problem.” Someone teased.

“I may not be able to do it alone, but if you can get the Duke to notice of this ridiculous affair, I don’t believe Roland Wimbledon would still dare to act so rampant any longer!”

Hearing the familiar name, Petrov was startled and started to follow the conversation, fully interested.

Chapter 103 - The Honeysuckle And The Elk Families (Part 2)

“What happened?” Petrov went through the crowded and asked.

“Sir Hull, they were talking about the Lord of Border Town,” answered someone that had seen the Honeysuckle crest on his chest. “He has confiscated all the belongings of our people from Longsong Stronghold!”

“You can call me Petrov. Tell me about the situation,” Petrov ordered.

“Let me explain it to you, Mr. Petrov,” Simon said while pressing through the crowd, revealing a pleasing smile. “This is how it is. We serve the Duke with our lives, so I lived in the Border Town where I was responsible for managing the mines. Every Winter we will take the town’s residents back with us to the Longsong Stronghold, where we are able to protect them from the demon beasts attack. But this year, after the end of the Months of the Demons, when one of my colleagues, Cornelius Fletcher came back to Border Town, the lord told him that his house has been demolished by the town’s people and that he wouldn’t receive any compensation for it!”

” ‘If you don’t admit that the house didn’t belong to you I will put you in prison for desertion, where you will wait for the day of your hanging,’ ” he said, exactly copying the 4th Prince’s words, “Sir you have to understand, what he called defection, is the procedure we have used for over a hundred years.”

Petrov couldn't stop himself from imaging the young man's appearance in his mind. Although to the outside world the Prince was extremely unbearable, but compared with his personal experience of their two meetings, Roland Wimbledon was no pushover. Also, his method of handling the crime of defection hit the nail on the head, however, the other side didn't try to think the matter through and was only looking for a reason – but the Prince never thought to convince the group of people with reason.

He has already broken away from Longsong Stronghold long ago, Petrov thought. Or, when he thought about it further, how can it be that the Prince never knew that the nobility would seek refuge in Longsong Stronghold? Obviously, that isn't possible. He clearly knew, yet he still forced a criminal charge upon them, forcing the other side to make a choice. But in the end, he still let the other party come back to Longsong Stronghold to report such a barbaric act, in the end, what is it that the Prince wants to achieve?

"But he is still the Lord of Border Town," said the man who Simon previous laughed at, "As the Lord, he has the power to dictate the rules within his own land."

"Border Town still belongs under the jurisdiction of the Western territory!" Simon retorted unhappy with a cold voice, "Do you question the authority of Duke Ryan? As the Duke, it's his job to supervise the mine, and he appointed the nobles to do it in his name. But now Roland had taken all the houses of the nobility for himself, which is openly pitting himself against the six Families, Duke Ryan will never stand by and only look as he does as he pleases."

“You’re speaking about the man who hanged Dimitry Hill?” Petrov didn’t know when Rene came over, “My father has been furious.”

“Young Lord,” Simon said greeting him with a salute, “It is exactly that man, and now he is behaving even more wildly. I’m afraid that only Duke Ryan can stop the Prince, and I hope that you will convey this issue to the Duke.“

“Don’t worry, even with or without this matter, Duke Ryan is already prepared to play his cards.” Rene seemed not the least bit concerned about the future, “It is for exactly this matter that I’ve come back, it is just that at this moment my eldest brother is still in the King’s City setting his name under a trade contract, so at the moment only I can lead the Elk Family.”

“Really? That’s great,” Simon said happily.

Petrov frowned, he himself knew that since the moment he came to deliver the trade offer and the Prince chose to stay for the Winter in Border Town, that such a day would come sooner or later. But he had never expected that his own friend would be fighting in this battle. Despite all the onlooking eyes, he pulled Rene directly to his side, trying to discourage him: “You shouldn’t go to battle, that is a Prince you’re fighting.”

“I know he is a prince, the Prince of the Mountain,” Rene patted on Petrov’s shoulders, “Rest assured, Duke Ryan will not hurt the Prince, maybe just as in the past he will surrender when he meets

resistance. Even if he wants to resist, as long as we launch an attack on our horses, those farmers and miners will scatter. The 4th Prince has never brandished a sword or spear, I think he won't even manage to cut a hair."

No, I was worried that you would be hurt by him... But he was unable to say it, he knew that the others would never believe him, because even for himself it was still difficult to believe. The Prince can only rely on farmers and miners, while the Duke can rely on knights. I do not know why, but my heart becomes uneasy when I think about it.

"Master Petrov, your father called for you, he has something to discuss with you." A white-haired steward suddenly rushed to the side of Petrov and talked into his ear.

"I've got it," Petrov nodded, and after an early goodbye to Rene, he took a coach back to the House of Honeysuckle with his housekeeper.

"Father," he entered the study and saw his father Shalafi Hull writing something by the table.

When he heard Paul's voice, the count did not pause his writing, "You have to sum up the number of people and their income within our domain and deliver your summary to me, I will then arrange the soldiers for the spring expedition. Duke Ryan has already sent out his call for weapons, When the snow melts, we and the other five families have to provide him with knights and mercenary, which will then march against Border Town."

“How much do we have to provide?”

The count put the pen down and raised his head, “What happened? Until now you have never concerned yourself with this kind of problem.” He reached to the side of the table and opened a letter, “We have to send at least twenty-five knights, together with their corresponding squires and horses. Also for the mercenaries, they must be fully equipped, and lastly we have to send 100 free people or serfs, who have to be equipped with simple weapons.

Petrov summed up the troops within his head if I add all the soldiers provided by the five families we will provide more than 1000 soldiers. Together with the Duke’s own troops, it will add up to a force able to sweep away any power in the western territory. Even if the Longsong Stronghold didn’t send their defending troops, this force isn’t something that Border Town can resist. After all Border Town only has two thousand inhabitants.

“Father, can you please stay away from the battlefield?” Petrov asked hesitantly.

“What do you want to say son?” the Count asked strangely.

“I’m worried about your safety.”

“His Royal Highness only has a few knights and less than 50 guards. Our numbers are more than ten times greater than his!”

Theoretically, this was the case, but his father had never seen the Prince before, but Petrov did. “But... Father, everybody said, that the wall made up out of mud paste will soon collapse, but the Prince presided over the construction and it still stands. They also said, that Border Town using only miners and farmers as soldiers, cannot stop the demonic beasts. His Royal Highness has not only done this, he was even able to defend his town until the end of the Demons of the Months, and during the whole months, no one fled from Border Town. “The more he said the more disturbed his heart became,” Now, once more, everyone thinks that Duke Ryan will defeat Roland Wimbledon, running over the Prince as easily as running over an ant. Father, are you certain that it will be as easy as you think?”

“That’s enough!” Shalafi slammed his fist onto the table. He shook his head and stood up, then he went to the wall – the wall on which the portraits of their ancestor hung. “You always liked more to be a businessman and buy and sell goods than riding a horse and going to war, this is fine for me. But being a merchant is not equal to being a coward. Those merchants who cross the ocean were threatened with death every day,” he shouted, pointing at the wall. “Look at the portraits, your grandfather, your grandfather’s grandfather, they all leaned on their longbow or their sword and defended themselves against demon beasts, bandits and brigands. You disappoint me, being so afraid of fighting! ”

No, Father. Petrov bowed his head, no longer motivated to argue, but within his heart he thought, you are talking about grandfather and grandfather’s father but if you took a closer look at those powerful faces, and then take a look at your loose belt and your overflowing double chin. Father, do you really believe you are able to use the bow?

Chapter 104 - Planning And Entertainment

On a sunny afternoon, it was finally time for Roland to fulfill his promises.

He conferred the title of Viscount to Sir Payne. In addition to the title he also received a territory to the south of the Redwater River and the right to set up a small village on the other side of the river. Currently, this new territory was still covered by jungle, but Roland had already planned to develop the land. In order to make him give up the autonomy of his newly acquired territory, Roland promised Sir Payne that he would give priority in opening up the territory as soon as possible.

Furthermore, on the open ground Roland would also establish several different kinds of industries, that would generate shares to be given to Sir Payne and his descendants. Roland of course, used his technical abilities as the reason to describe why it was needed for him to supervise the industries. He also explained to him that there was a pretty good possibility to receive money without having to do anything.

Sir Payne readily agreed to this offer – after all, he didn't like this kind of work, in his view, there was nothing more interesting than riding a horse into battle. But after he had his daughter, he instead put his focus into hunting. The industries in his old territory had already long since been ruined, so he simply asked Roland to help him sell his land which was located east of Longsong Stronghold, after all his family had already completely moved and started to live in Border Town. Roland naturally agreed to his request.

Another person he conferred a title to was Brian, who was awarded with a knighthood. Afterward Brian had to choose if he wanted to get his own territory or still wanted to serve in the army.

If he chose the land, then he could no longer serve in Border Town's first Army. If he decided to join the army, he had to, just like the others receive his land due to the achievement of his military merits. Without any hesitation, Brian chose the latter option.

As a result, Roland could finally start with planning the general layout of his territory.

With the Redwater River as one boundary, and the Impassable Mountain Range as the other. The living area had a length of three kilometers and a width of seven to eight kilometers. After the construction of the residential areas, it could also later be used as a prize, which could be given as an additional reward to promoted officers.

The other side of the Redwater River will become the future industrial areas and agricultural areas. The land could be extended to the south, but the only problem was that it was still covered by forest. In addition, its topography sloped higher and lower in the further distances. To meet the needs of the population, Roland must begin to reclaim the land.

The border area to the west of the garrison and the forest where the demonic beasts hid themselves were also important areas to open up.

The forest has a wide range of treasures, such as wood, edible fungi, wild animals, herbs and more. In addition to using wood for construction and in industry, it could also be used as a fuel source. The vast area covered by the forest was staggering. Roland had already sent Lighting to explore it, but even flying more than thirty kilometers she still hadn't been able to see its end, that meant that if all of the wood in the forest was to be used for building a fire, it would burn for a very long time.

The last area was the territory between the Hiding Forest and the Impassable Mountain Range – it was a no man's land , a restricted area, in other words, a barbarian wasteland. He could only speculate how big the area between the Impassable Mountain Range and the border of the forest was. Both borders were extremely vast, it had to be much bigger than the territory of the Kingdom of Graycastle. In the face of such an extremely large and ownerless land, Roland's heart began to itch. But he also knew that for the moment he was temporarily unable to bother himself with this piece of land. At present, the most important thing for Border Town was to increase its population.

Back in his office at the castle, he called for the artist Soraya.

"How was your work, are you still helping out in the Town Hall?"

"I have never painted so many paintings in one day," she seemed to be in a much better condition than the last time he had seen her, "today I have already finished the basic pictures, but only painting pictures of their heads while looking through a window, feels a

little strange.”

“They would easily become scared when they see your magic pen”, the prince smiled, “they know that there are witches in Border Town, but if you get in close contact with them, it could easily cause accidents, so we just took some simple hidden measures, not letting them know that you are a witch. Later their opinion will slowly start to change.”

Soraya’s photographic ability helped to bring Roland’s citizenship registration program to a new level. For this plan, he had emptied a room in the Town Hall and then used the room to store the information about the town’s citizens. It was similar to a population register, on each piece of paper were written their names, ages, addresses, blood relatives and so on. This information was all the statistics he had gathered during the winter, and now the records were expanded with new content. The biggest change to all of their personal accounts was that he added to each of them a “color photo.”

According to Roland’s request, the Town Hall had set up a small room large enough for one person that was enterable without being seen, it had only a small window through which Soraya could see the face of the person she should paint. So when she painted the portrait of her subject, the other person couldn’t see her using her magic pen.

As to how it was possible for him to let the town’s residents come over and give their personal information so freely, Roland’s method was very simple, whoever came over and gave their information, got 10 copper royals – he ordered the Town Hall to

allocate the money.

“Today I called you here to draw something else.” Roland took out some cutout papers and gave them to Soraya.

The latter noted that the sizes of those pieces of papers were exactly the same, with a size of half a palm, and in a rectangular format.

“What do you want me to paint?”

“Some props for entertainment,” Roland said.

He had this idea within his mind for a long time already, every day the witches had nothing to do besides practicing their magic, this life had to be a bit boring. The same could be said for the Prince, especially when he had to wait for the moment the snow finally melted, until then he was stuck within the castle. Therefore, he came up with the idea of reinventing some games from his old word and finding a way for the witches to relax.

The simplest possibility was to create a card game. But the soft ordinary paper he had wasn’t suitable for card games, shuffling was also a hassle. However, with Soraya, he could finally make some more advanced things.

“Entertainment?” She crouched her head, wondering what kind of entertainment she was painting on a square piece of paper, “Okay, you have the final say.”

“First, on this piece of paper, you have to draw a soldier with a heavy crossbow.”

“Imagine?”

“Yes, the armor, the body shape, age, and the surroundings, everything up to you to freely imagine, as long as it has a heavy crossbow.”

“Uh... I will try it,” Soraya closed her eyes, meditation for a while, then she summoned her pen into her hand and soon a bright light streamed from her hands onto the paper.

Soon, a middle-aged man looking just like a crossbow soldier appeared on the paper.

“Very well,” Roland praised, “Let me think about what the next painting should be, ah... in the upper left corner of the paper and the middle position, draw a small circle at each of these positions,” he recalled the card in his head “The first circle is white in the center with a golden coating, and the second one has an orange color together with a golden coating,” he said.

When the circles were finished, Roland let her add a number to the first circle, “and to the second circle you will add a bow and an arrow mark into the circle.”

The beauty of Soraya’s ability lied in her ability to ignore the

material she had to paint on, it didn't matter to her if it was a blank sheet of paper or an already painted piece. The second design can perfectly cover the former painting, like a layered mask.

Thus, a delicate "crossbow card" appeared in front of Roland.

"Is this what you wanted?" She asked.

"This is just the card of one unit, there are still many similar cards waiting to be painted by you. By the end, you will get a deck and then I'll teach you how to play."

When looking at Soraya who was painting with her eyes closed, Roland felt a kind of hunch from his heart. Perhaps soon a dialog like this would be heard within the castle –

"Do you have anything important to do? If not, let us first play a round of 'Gwent'!"

Chapter 105 - Army Marching Song

Echo was sitting on the highest point of the castle – on the roof of the watchtower, from where she was able to overlook the whole town.

She was only able to reach the top thanks to Lightning taking her up on a piggyback ride, now she had to stay here until sunset, only then would the little girl come back and take her back down. At the moment, Lightning should have already been on her way to the Longsong Stronghold.

The weather was very good today, the sun was shining brightly, and the river in the distance looked under the sunlight like it was made of satin, slowly flowing westwards and dividing the green leaves on the one side and the snowy landscape on the other side into two sides. Lying comfortably in the sun, she felt as if her whole body was embraced warmly by the sun. It was completely unlike her previous time in the extreme south, where the scorching sunlight was so aggressive that it easily hurt her skin.

Even the wind isn't the same, she thought, during my life I've already felt six different kinds of wind. The slightly salty sea breeze in Port of Clearwater, while in King City I felt the wind of the hot and damp monsoons, during my travel through the Impassable Mountain Range we were constantly accompanied by the freezing cold North Wind. And now, here in Border Town, the light breeze has an earthly aroma to it. No matter what, the wind here is pure and independent.

In the Ironsand City, it was either so hot that there was no wind,

or we would have an overwhelming storm. Then the wind became visible and the storming air mixes with the stones and gravel, from afar it looked like a giant black monster. Every time the wind came up, I had to hide inside a house or any place else which wasn't in the open. There was nothing that was able to stop the wind.

Echo still wanted to throw up. And taking her revenge when she thought about her past, it was nearly four years ago that she left Ironsand City. Her Osha clan, unfortunately, was defeated during a fight for power, her father killed by their enemy even after he surrendered. Echo who witnessed all this, wanted to rush to the enemy and take him down by herself, but at that moment she had been caught off-guard from behind.

She didn't know how many member of her clan were still alive after these four years.

Before she was sold as a slave to the Port of Clearwater, she heard that her Osha clan had violated the agreements of the sacred duel, and were now spurned by the Three Gods. Who then exiled them to the Endless Cape, never being allowed to return to Ironsand City.

But Echo knew that it was all a conspiracy by the Tibia clan, they had smeared black oil on their whip and as long as this oil was ignited, even water was unable to put it out. It was this trick which caught her brother – the clan's strongest warrior – off-guard in the duel, so that he was burned alive, leading to the chaos in their team's formation.

In the Endless Cape the only thing beside the hot sand were the

ever-burning fires of Mother Earth, who was even more maniac than her brother the Emperor of the Sea. Soon the people of her clan would have turned into bones; but in the end, her fate as a slave was even more miserable.

When Echo awakened to her power – she knew that she had become a witch. Naturally, she thought about revenge, but in the end her ability was useless, she was only able to release sound. No matter how much she begged the gods, they never heard her prayers.

Six months later when she was living in the Port of Clearwater, she came to an understanding, the thought that they were loved by the three Gods was in truth only their self-deception. Under the jurisdiction of the Church, the witches were all hunted inside the four Kingdoms. From that day on, Echo completely gave up on her hope for revenge.

At this moment, suddenly a billow of smoke rose from the distance. She looked to the East Bank of Redwater River and she saw several lights of green flames flash through the trees. The black smoke of the burning trees mixed together with the vapor of the melting snow forming a gray plume in the sky.

It was Anna's green flame.

When they arrived for the first time in Border Town, Wendy had briefed the sisters about Anna and Nana. When Echo heard about Anna's ability she was very envious.

Anna was able to freely manipulate flames, it could even reach the temperature hot enough to melt swords... If she had such a powerful ability when she had lived in Ironsand City, the people of the Tibia Clan would never have been able to hurt them.

Echo shook her head, thoughts like these were totally unnecessary, most probably her people had already turned into bones. Since she was still alive she could count herself as lucky. Since His Royal Highness was willing to accept her, she should complete the orders given by His Royal Highness.

She cleared her throat and began to hum the song according to the Prince's demands.

It was a cheerful ditty, the Prince had only hummed the melody once, but she completely remembered the whole ditty.

Music was nothing new to Echo, as a superior slave she was taught many things. Seductive dances and flirtatious crooning were skills she'd had to master. But the music given by His Highness was completely differently... it was full of rhythm, full of powerful energy. Especially when he asked her to simulate the sound of a flute, every note was like a pulsing beat, people hearing this couldn't help themselves from wanting to dance.

The difficulty lied in playing several instruments at the same time, later there were also drums and string-instruments that were added. So she had to simulate three different kinds of sounds at the same time, which overlapped each other. Something like this was something that she had never done before. Previously she would have never believed that music could also be played in this way!

In the beginning, it was hard for her to make sure that the drums didn't disrupt the rhythm of the flutes, so Roland gave her the tip to play the beat with her hands or feet, and only later gradually start to fuse the two sounds together.

After a few days of practice, Echo had gradually mastered this kind of music.

After playing it for several times she was self-assured enough to finally add the in the string-instruments.

When Echo played the new melody for the first time, she had to change the notes again a little –if the sound of the cheerful flute were the torso, the heated drums were the bones, and the last seemingly embellished strings were the soul. She increased the beat, over and over again, until the three instruments were finally fully integrated, the sound was getting higher and higher until she couldn't stop herself from starting to sing –

“My attack power is higher than yours, so it's my win.”

Roland put his last card on the table, and Soraya who set across of him covered her face and said with a low voice.

“One more round,” then she thought for a moment, and shuffled through the cards. “Let me pick your ten cards this time.”

“Well,” coughed the Prince, “It’s already late, I have still several things to do, you should go to the other.”

After laying down a groundwork of different cards, the next part was to copy the already invented cards. With the template in front of her, Soraya’s speed of drawing was comparable to a printer. Soon, Roland got several copies of the same units.

So naturally Soraya became his first opponent.

After explaining the rules to her, the first card war was started. During the games, he quickly learned that the thinking process of the witches was completely differently from ordinary people. Soraya quickly figured out the right way to use the skills. After playing for several rounds, Roland was still able to win, but this was only due using several special cards. When Soraya asked him to create her own special cards, he shamefully rejected.

“All right,” Soraya said, then she took the cards into her arms and ran into the direction of the door. At this moment, a cheerful melody came through the open windows. Hearing this Soraya paused, turned around and ran to the window, taking a probing look outside, “Is that Echo?”

“Well, it looks like she has completely mastered it.” Roland leaned back in his chair and admired the familiar music.

Border Town’s first Army would soon enter the first stage of comprehensive maneuvering. Compared with the training for shooting while standing on the wall, the comprehensive

maneuvering would be carried out in the wild. At the same time that they moved through the wild, they had to hold their formation – always forming a shooting line.

In order to make the soldiers march with the same pace, he had to rely on drums and slogans. But now with Echo, he could simulate several instruments at the same time. Now they had only had to simply learn English, then they could implement several famous marching sounds.

Compared to the simple drums, the marching song would not only control the marching speed, it would also effectively boost morale. Of course, the most famous marching song was the “The British Grenadiers”, but Roland only knew its name, but he didn’t know the full tune.

But this didn’t pose a problem for him, as long as he had the tune to “The British Grenadiers”, he could always rearrange its lines later.

During the “War of Resistance”, the sound could be heard through the whole nation, north and south of the Yangtze River. And nearly everyone was familiar with its melody, after all, it was the famous “[Guerrillas’ Song](#).”

When Soraya turned her head in the direction of the Prince, she heard the Prince following the song, gently singing. He sang in a language she had never heard before, but still, the melody and the lyric fitted together perfectly.

“We are all sharpshooters,”

“Each bullet takes out an enemy.”

“We are all soldiers with wings,”

“Unafraid of tall mountains and deep waters.”

“In the dense forests,”

“Our comrades set their camps.”

“On the tall mountains,”

“Our countless brothers are there.”

“...”

Chapter 106 - It's Not The Same For Him

When Scroll knocked on the door, she quickly heard an answer from the other side, "Please enter."

Hearing this she pushed open the door and stepped into the room. Within the room she saw Anna sitting at her table in front of the window, busy reading a thick book.

The sunlight was flooding the room through the window, stretching the woman's silhouette until it was unusually long. Within the sun her soft cheeks and neck were dazzlingly white, and her shoulder-covering flaxen hair seemed to be made of white gold.

After nearly a week of living together, Scroll had basically understood Anna's temperament. For example, if she had something to say she would speak bluntly and never equivocate. She was calm and quiet, especially studious... In short, it was difficult to find any other civilian born person like Anna who was totally at peace with herself.

"How is it that you aren't playing that... card game?" Scroll took a chair and placed it next to Anna. During the last two days, whenever her sisters had finished their daily practice, they would immediately rush back to the castle, crowding Soraya's room playing the so-called Gwent card game and competing against each other to collects more cards. It seemed like they would never get tired of this. She even saw that Anna and Nana played this game every day after they learned the rules. There were only rare occasion where they didn't play. Unlike the previous days, she

would often see the young girl with the healing powers coming to the castle to play.

“I just wanted to read some books,” Anna turned to the next page, “Since I don’t have your ability, I have to spend more time to read the books.”

Anna almost read everything, from historical biographies to long poems, including every book she saw on the streets even if it was only a variety of folk tales, as long as they were collected into a book, she would read them with relish.

Scroll touched her head sympathetically, “Don’t worry. Remind me that I wanted to give you a new book to read.”

It was only because of her, that the fate of us survivors of the Witch Cooperation Association had so greatly changed, Scroll thought. If it wasn’t for her, Nightingale would never have left halfway for the direction of Border Town. So we would never have met the 4th Prince of Kingdom of Graycastle, and so would never have come to know the method to staying healthy. In a sense, she was the savior to all witches.

Which was also the reason why Scroll had from the beginning felt only goodwill for Anna, while the latter also quickly accepted the other witch who had so much knowledge and experience. But it was also clear that Anna greatly envied Scroll for her ability, which in return to Scroll was a little ridiculous. In the Witch Cooperation Association, the sisters never showed any envy for another witches’ abilities. It was even more ridiculous since Anna had the largest magic capacity Nightingale had ever seen a witch possessed

before, furthermore the ability of her green flame was also one of the strongest.

“Your hair has become a little long,” Anna’s curly bangs were nearly covering her eyes, “Is there no one who can help you cut them?”

Anna shook her head. “No, I’m all on my own.”

Suddenly Scroll became totally motivated, “Your tangled hair isn’t good-looking, let me cut it for you.”

“You’d do this for me?”

“I’ve cut the hair of most of the sisters during our time in the camp,” Scroll answered happily. “Wait a minute, I’ll go get the tools.”

She soon came back while holding a cloth bag. When she spread the bag’s content out, Anna saw several white pieces of clothes and a bronze scissor. The scissor was V-shaped, and at both its ends it had many scratches, already losing its gloss and clearly showing that it was well used.

Before Scroll had joined the Witch Cooperation Association, the scissors were used to help her cut the hairs of her customers in the Sea Wind Region. All the copper royals she didn’t need to buy bread were handed over to an old captain with a broken leg. This captain was the one who’d taught her to read and write until he

died of old age.

Scrolls skillfully put one of the white clothes on Anna's neck, and started cutting her hair.

"I had some questions I wanted to ask you," Anna announced.

"What do you want to know?" Under her skillful fingers the scissor flew through Anna's hair, always releasing a crisp Kaka sound. Soon the first cluster of finger length hair was cut and fell to the ground.

"Many of the stories described in the books I'd gotten from you yesterday, almost always have the same ending. Will the Prince always take a princess as his bride?"

Hearing this question Scroll's hand paused for a moment, the stories in the book were not stories of a real people, instead it was a collection of stories she had heard within her ten years in the Sea Breeze Region. They were stories told to her by the sailors. But Scroll had specifically put this kind of stories together, and every story where the Prince wouldn't marry the Princess didn't have a happy ending. These kinds of stories were put together in one book and which she then gave to Anna to read.

Always knowing that after reading Anna would ask her exactly this question, but now that she really had to answer the question, she hesitated.

"Most of the time this is the case, of course, some princes will also marry the daughter of a Grand Duke or a Duke, for example, Graycastle's King Wimbledon III, his wife was the daughter of the Duke of Silvercity."

Answering the question like this, Scroll suddenly felt very sad. Wendy and Scroll herself had already talked about Nightingale's situation but compared to the mature and calm Shadow Killer, she was more worried about the possibility that the Prince and Anna would develop deeper feeling and become closer.

Anna was a woman who was very important to His Royal Highness, and everyone could clearly see this. When Anna and Roland were in the same room, his eyes would always fall on her. Anna's life was several times busier than that of any other sisters. Even more important than that was that even Nightingale had to share her room with Wendy, but His Royal Highness didn't change Anna's room into a double, making her the only one who was allowed to have a room all to herself. The reason for this was that when Nana came over to sleep in the castle she could share the room with Anna – he seemed to not realize that he was the owner of this place and that there was no reason that he had to explain himself.

And for Anna it was the same case, when she was together with the other witches she was a person of few words, she was even for most of the time just a quiet listener. But when Roland was by her side she would immediately become active. If there was anything which was able to let her forget about her books, Scroll thought that only the Prince was able to achieve this.

Unfortunately, Roland was the 4th son of the former King of Graycastle, the future King who will support the witches, and Anna was only a witch.

Since Roland was a Prince, Scroll was unable to order him, so she had no other choice than to influence Anna in the direction she thought would be correct. She didn't want those two to be estranged from each other, but she also didn't want to see it ending in the only possible result, a tragedy.

"Why?" asked Anna shaking her head, as if to try to get the memories of her destroyed dreams out of her head. "Does he have to do this, even though he doesn't like the princess or any other woman of the nobility?"

"Uh..." Scroll hadn't thought that she would continue questioning, "Even then he had still has to marry them."

Because the Prince would most likely become the new king and the king's marriage can't be his own personal decision. She tried to recall some of the knowledge from the books that would help her,

"In order to stabilize the powers within his own country. In order to appease the neighboring countries. In order to achieve a good deal, these are all important reason for marrying a princess. But the most important matter is that the King has to have heirs."

Hearing all this, Anna did not ask any further, which in return made Scroll a little relieved. This kind of thing was something only slowly achieved, not something she could force. But she believed

that one day Anna would understand her thoughts.

When the trimming came to its end, Scroll scratched the fringes on Anna's shoulder away, "Now, you're looking great."

"Thank you," said Anna and bowed thankfully.

"Well, for today's book..." Scroll thought for a moment, then she decided to tell her about the Wolfsheart Kingdom's history, trying to reinforce the impression she had installed today, "her own selection of the royal family biography."

When Scroll was finally ready to leave, Anna suddenly began to speak, still holding the book of illusion within her hands, "I think Roland isn't one of those Princes from your stories." Her voice was very steady and powerful, nothing as if she was only speaking to convince herself, "He will do whatever he wants to do. His decision won't be influenced by anything else."

"..." For a long time Scroll was startled, and in the end, she could only merely ask, "Why?"

"If he were one of those princes, he would never have saved me."

Chapter 107 - Asking For His Intention

After dinner Roland returned to his office to continue to copy down all the primary mathematical knowledge from his mind onto paper.

He wasn't gifted with an extraordinarily retentive memory, and also not to forget that his memory would decline over time. Because of his former job, he had often used mathematical and physical knowledge to get the job done. But his knowledge about other subjects such as History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry and the other classes, had in the years degraded back to entry level. Therefore, even if it was a little early, he still wanted to write down all of his knowledge, so that other people could at least learn from it.

Each time when he filled up a piece of paper, he gave the letter to Scroll, letting her read it. As long as she saw the content, it was equivalent to permanently preserving his work. Unfortunately, Scroll's ability was only being able to remember everything, even with all the content it didn't mean she was able to self-teach herself high school mathematics knowledge. So whenever Roland had time, he would explain to her the knowledge she had previously read.

Of course, with regards to lecturing others, Roland liked it very much and thought that it was an interesting job. Especially when he at first saw the confused look on Scroll's face, then when her expression would turn into one of concentration only to suddenly turn into a look filled with realization. Whenever he saw this look he would feel a sense of accomplishment. However, Roland clearly knew that it also had to do with the target of his lessons.

Although Scroll was already nearing the age of forty, but the aging of her face had been greatly slowed by her magic. The skin on her cheeks was still tight and had a healthy touch of red, her hair was tied behind her head, giving her a mature and capable look. The tiny crow's feet in the corner of her eyes didn't damage her overall aesthetic appearance, instead, it brought out the impression of someone with a stable temperament. If she were to be placed in a movie, she would definitely give off the impression of an elegant and versatile teacher. Now, when he was able to stun this "teacher" with his knowledge, the sense of contrast felt quite good.

Roland was silently asked himself, in the end, what is magic in this world?

Magic is everywhere, whether one is in the depths of the Northern Slope Mine or in the Impassable Mountain Range. In the barbarian wasteland west of us or in the east within the Sea Wind Region. A witch would always be able to cast her incredible magic. If I look at the magic to be the same as energy, then the witches are the same as an electrical instrument. But the magic power obviously has many more possibilities to offer than electricity would have, it was more like it was the "origin" of all energies.

For example, Wendy had said that Cara was able to summon four different kinds of magical snakes, namely: death, pain, petrification, and nothingness. Each of them had a different kind of venom. Another example was Nightingale, her ability to enter into the fog would almost distort space.

The witches' magical abilities varied so much, that other than being related to the origin of the world, Roland couldn't think of any description more appropriate.

To give a definition of the origin, someone has to look at the universe and its rules. In my former world, Einstein determined the four fundamental forces of the universe and put them into a theoretical framework, the so-called grand unified theory. In other words, what he did was to find the origin of the universe. In case someone found the rule to the universe, could this rule then be applied in every universe?

Coming to this point, Roland couldn't help himself from questioning, if he returned to his former world, would there also be the same power, yet, because they had no witches who could access this power, the power got just ignored by the people?

No matter what, at the moment Roland could only think about it. After all, with the current level of technology, he couldn't analyze this power closer.

So promoting the industrial revolution and promoting the standard of civilization, was the most important work for him.

Maybe one day, the power could not only be used by the witches with their direct access to the origin – converting it into a kind of energy, that could be used for a variety kind of effects at the same time, just thinking about it made him feel totally excited.

"Your Royal Highness? When Scroll saw the Prince lost in

thoughts with an intoxicated look on his face, she couldn't stop herself from speaking out.

"Well," Roland said, slowly coming back from his thoughts, after embarrassingly coughing twice he glanced at the burning candle and told her, "That was enough for today, come back tomorrow."

"Yes, Your Highness," Scroll bowed once, but when she was already on her way leaving the room, she unknowingly slowed her pace.

When Roland even after half a minute didn't hear the closing sound of the door, he raised his head in confusion. Seeing that the other one was still standing in the doorway he asked. "Was there anything else?"

"Your Highness..." Scroll hesitated for a moment but then she said. "I want to ask you a question."

"Ask freely." Roland nodded and put his quill down and instead raised his cup and drank some tea. There was really no problem with the witches, that was, if someone searched for it, someone could point out that they weren't confident enough. They were just the same as rabbits, slowly sticking their heads out of their hole, always ready to flee back into it even if the grass was only moved by the wind. It would be better if they weren't any longer so afraid and would act more freely.

Roland's estimation was that her question, would be the usual kind of, why are you willing to host us? Aren't you afraid of the

threat by the church and the likes? Nightingale and Wendy had asked him this kind of question so many times, that he couldn't count it any longer. But since Scroll was in such an earnest mood, he naturally had to give her a seriously answer. So that they could experience his honest comrade like treatment, giving them the feeling of being surrounded by a warm spring breeze.

“Is it... possible that you would ever marry a witch?”

“Pfft,” Roland nearly sprayed the tea out of his mouth. “Uh, why would you ask that?”

“I...” Scroll opened her mouth, but in the end, she was still unable to answer him.

To marry a witch? When thinking about this question, the first person appearing within his mind was Anna. From the time he met her in the cage, and he saw her pair of lake like blue eyes, she had left a deep impression on his heart. Before their awakening, witches are just ordinary human women, but afterwards, their ability made them superior. And the same could be said about the appearance of their body, both were superior to that of an ordinary woman. If he were to place them in modern society, they would definitely become the focus of everyone's attention. So, is there any reason why I should hesitate? That not being the case –

He looked at Scroll and replied with a smile: “Why would I not?”

On the way back to her room, Wendy rubbed her sore shoulders.

My chest is just too big, it's causing nothing but trouble. Especially when I have to stay on the roof of my small sheet on Little Town. I have to raise my hands when I summon the wind, but when I do, I also have to bend backward, if not I will lose my balance.

Compared to the first test trial, Little Town had gotten a number of improvements. For example, she had gotten a simple shed at her workplace, both to block the wind and rain, but also to avoid the sun's exposure. Another improvement was the tree bark which was now fastened around the hull, it was used to reduce the incoming collision force when landing at port. Also, both sides of the ship were now equipped with two cement blocks, to make things easy for fastening the ship with hemp rope.

And after nearly a month of training, her ability to control the wind had gotten substantial better. Now, regardless if the ship was stable or not, she could always control the degree of the wind, letting it blow fast or slow. She had also learned to use the already existing wind to adjust her own magic consumption, so that in the end she would be able to summon her wind for a longer period of time.

Nightingale who came home before Wendy had already finished her bathing and was now sitting in pajamas on the bedside waiting for Wendy's return.

But when Wendy saw her, there seemed to be something strange, Nightingale had an irrepressible smile on her face

“What kind of good thing happened to you?” Wendy asked. But the later shook her head without saying anything, with only her smile growing even deeper.

Wendy curled her lips, after their talk some nights ago, Nightingale’s mood wasn’t very good, but after the creation of the new card game it had somewhat improved again. But today, how was it that she was full of smiles? Where had the expressionless Shadow Killer from Silver City gone?

Without getting an answer, Wendy took off her clothes and stepped into the bucket filled with hot water. Most probably, she had won a good card today.

Chapter 108 - Echo (Part 1)

The Months of the Demons had already ended two weeks ago, and the snow has finally turned into streams which ran into the Redwater River.

The spotlessly white landscape slowly faded away, and the trees on both sides began to sprout again, becoming green once more.

The land to the east of Border Town was the land Anna that had already cleared of trees and snow, and because of this, it had now been turned by His Highness into the temporary practice ground for the First Army.

At the practice ground, Carter was holding a gun and checking if the bayonet was securely installed.

This was the newest invention of His Highness, but compared to the automatic operating machine and the modified snow powder, this new invention seemed to be a little too simple. The moment he had for the first time taken the new weapon into his hands, Carter knew almost immediately that it wasn't a qualified weapon.

In short, it was just a sharp iron triangle, with the middle line as the base, which had two small iron pieces pointing downwards. Although it had a sharp edge, it was absolutely impossible to slash with the weapon – the blade was just too short, if it had to bend, it would immediately break. It had hardly any tip to speak of while the other end was only around a thumb thick. Even if he was able to attack an enemy, if he tried to slash out horizontally, Carter

couldn't say whether he would even be able to cut apart the enemy's clothes.

This weapon had only one use, and that was, stabbing. And before it could even be used it still had to be connected to the gun. Used by itself, even a dagger would be a better weapon.

In the eyes of the knight, it was totally unqualified to be used as a weapon and a big waste of pig iron to create such weapon with only one type of attack. If a blacksmith within his territory had dared to create such a weapon, he would have tied the man and given him one fierce beating.

But even if it was such a bad weapon, Carter could still see His Highness originality and his passion for the all of the details. For example, the design for the connection between the gun and the bayonet. The mouth of the barrel had two grooves with a right angle at its end, as long as the two small iron pieces at the bayonet were fitted into the grooves and the bayonet was turned half around the barrel then the bayonet would become fixed. Thanks to this concept the grooves and the iron pieces didn't need to fit perfectly, if they were a little too loose, the gunner could just insert some pieces of paper between the two iron pieces and the grooves, and when it fitted better, only then should he rotate the bayonet. In the case that they didn't have any papers, tree leaves would also be okay.

“Put the bayonet on the gun!”

When they heard the keyword, the gunning team took out the bayonet from their bag, and put it on the gun's barrel – until now

they had only been able to produce forty of the new weapons and their supporting bags. So the soldier who didn't receive the new weapons had to put a short stick on their guns.

This kind of action was almost trained through the whole morning, and now most soldier only needed to adjust the bayonet two to three times until it was fixed. According to His Highness' words, the bayonet should only be used as a last resort. He didn't want his men to start a close combat attack on their own with the bayonet. Carter disagreed with this statement, as long as a man didn't personally stab a weapon into an enemy, they would still be considered as children. Only if they saw their first blood, would they transform from ordinary miners and hunters into soldiers.

Iron Axe also stood among the ranks of trainees. Although he had previous claimed to only be a hunter, but from his skills Carter could see, that the man had absolutely received special combat training before. His skills weren't any worse than the skills of any other knight.

His Royal Highness had asked Carter to teach the soldiers how to use the new weapon correctly. Having received this order, Carter felt a little guilty. The bayonet was a kind of weapon he had never seen before, so it was impossible that he couldn't know how to use it.

However, after seeing the prototype, Carter was once more immediately filled with confidence. After all, the bayonet was nothing other than the equivalent of a short spear. In addition, due to its special blade, it was much easier to use than the pike.

Due to its unique blade design, the bayonet training method has also become very special. They didn't need to learn how to split, lift, block or sweep with the bayonet, they only had to train one move, stabbing. So the knight let all the soldiers line up and then began to teach them the most suitable method for stabbing – placing one foot before the other, bending the knees and then pushing their arms forward with their maximum amount of power.

This kind of repetitive training method was extremely boring. So Carter was amazed that everyone was so meticulously completing this kind of training exercise. Before the winter, they were all still a bunch of weak and lazy civilians, but now they behaved like a decent group of trainees. When Carter shouted a command they would immediately take action, and he had to acknowledge that they even put more effort into the training than the squires he had previously trained. Of course, if he were to give them a sword, or to say it using the words of His Royal Highness, if he gave them "cold weapons", he would still be able to defeat them with a stick in a mere three strokes. But in terms of their willpower, their progress is already worthy of acknowledgement.

After an hour of training, Carter let the gun team sit down and gave them a break. At this moment His Royal Highness the Prince also showed up on the practice ground, followed by a woman who was wearing a hood. This didn't take the Knight by surprise. Previously, at the beginning of the training, His Royal Highness had informed him in advance, that during today's practice they would be assisted by a witch.

However, Carter hadn't known that the witch would be so tall, as far as he could determine it with his eyes, she was almost as high as

His Highness. But nevertheless she is still exquisite and good looking, Carter thought. Then he came back from his thought and let the soldiers stand up, allowing them to greet the 4th Prince with a salute.

“Your Highness!” The soldiers shouted and raised their hands.

“Thank you for your effort,” receiving their greeting Roland nodded, and walked around since he also wanted to speak with just Carter alone. But at this moment a soldier suddenly rushed in the direction of the Prince. Discovering this Carter frowned, placed his hand on the hilt of his sword and took a step forward, placing the Prince behind himself. Nightingale had been even faster to react, her hand appeared out of the fog and grabbed Roland’s arm. As long as the situation turned out to go even slightly wrong, she would be able to pull the Prince into the fog.

But then they discovered that the person was rushing out was actually Iron Axe.

And even more, he didn’t run to the Prince, but instead to the unknown witch, immediately falling down to his knees in front of her. Not the Kingdom’s normal kneeling on one knee, no, he threw his whole body flat on the ground, with his head deeply buried between his arms, “My Clan Leader!”

With this, the training of the gun team came to a forced break.

“First tell me, what’s going on?”

Back in the Castle Hall, Carter, Echo, and Iron Axe stood in a row, while Roland sat at the Lord position, he asked, clearly dissatisfied.

Discipline, you have to always maintain discipline! This is one of the most important rules within the militia and now the army should also have the same iron discipline! Not to speak about seeing the Clan Leader, even if you were to see the King you shouldn’t move even a toe out of line. This is the only requirement, there will be always time to report later.

From the beginning, Roland had a very good impression of Iron Axe, but with his action of today, he could only sigh. So his final analysis was, it seemed that his inner cultural quality wasn’t able to keep up with his practical talents, he clearly hadn’t understood the meaning of the word discipline.

“Your Royal Highness,” Iron Axe couldn’t help himself to wait any longer. He wanted to kneel down, showing his regret. But when he was already halfway down on his knee, he was stopped by Roland.

“Stand straight and speak!”

‘Yes!’’ Iron Axe swallowed nervously, and then began to speak, “I grew up in Ironsand City and vowed my loyalty and devotion to the Osha Clan and the new Clan Leader Silver Moon.”

“No, Kabago, I am not the Clan Leader...” Echo quickly disagreed.

“No, you are,” Iron Axe retorted, “Your father and brother already died, in accordance with the Osha custom, from the moment of their death you became the Clan Leader of our Osha Clan. When I heard that you were sold to the Port of Clearwater I immediately went there, but I was unable to find you, I thought that you had ... died.”

“But I -”

Roland interrupted Echo, “One by one, first let Iron Axe finish his story.”

“I will obey you until the end of my life, Your Highness.”

...

The story wasn’t complicated; Roland was quickly able to understand the general idea behind what happened.

Echo was originally a member of the Ironsand City’s Osha Clan. Her former name was Silver Moon, and her father had been the Clan Leader of the Osha Clan.

The people of Sand Nation didn’t have an easy life. Ironsand City was only able to accommodate a limited population, so every three years, each clan had to take part in the sacred duel, and the six clans who won would receive the right to live in the city, while the

other clans either lived outside of the city, or went together to the Green Sea. These places were dangerous places to live, although they offered water, but the demonic beasts and sandstorms would cause a great threat to the Sandpeople. So during each Sacred Duel, the warriors of various clan would spare no effort in order to win.

Chapter 109 - Echo (Part 2)

However, in the duel, the Osha Clan lost to the insidious means used by the Tribian Clan. Not only that, but in the end, even their Patriarch was killed and the Clan ended up being exiled to the Endless Cape. Silver Moon, the daughter of the former Patriarch now known as Echo, because of her outstanding appearance was sold as a slave by the slavers to a businessman from the Port of Clearwater.

Iron Axe with his identity as a mixed blood, despite being an adopted member of Sandpeople was not a real member of the Osha Clan. And therefore he hadn't been sentenced into exile. But because of his strong combat abilities, the other clans took a liking to him and wanted to recruit him to their side. Yet Iron Axe who had over years received a type familial care from the old Patriarch coupled with the hope of saving Echo, did not hesitate to reject the offers of the other Clans. After a long and a difficult journey, he finally arrived at his goal, the Port of Clearwater. But he never got to know that at this time, Echo had already been sold to the King of Graycastle.

However, in the end the latter was rescued by a witch, who'd belonged to the Witch Cooperation Association; while the other disheartenedly moved to the West border of the Kingdom of Graycastle. Yet today, these two people unexpectedly meet once again in Border Town.

"Then what are your plans for the future," Roland asked after pondering for a moment about what he had heard just now, "Do you want to return to the South, take Echo with you and revive the Osha Clan?"

“No, Your Highness!” Iron Axe went down on one knee, “I have already sworn to the Three Gods, that for the rest of my life I will always work for you... I was just... I was just too excited to see Silver Moon again. I couldn’t control my emotions, please punish me!”

“What about you?” The Prince asked Echo. “Do you want to avenge your people?”

Being asked this question, Echo also knelt down before Roland, “When I awakened to my witch powers, I truly had the thoughts of seeking revenge. But today I no longer harbor such feelings.” She bit on her lip and weakly asked, “Please allow me to stay here... I don’t have anywhere else I can go.”

“I understand. Please, stand up,” Roland said quietly, “You don’t need to act in this manner, don’t worry, I won’t banish you.” He paused for a moment, then said strongly, “In fact, letting you achieve your revenge also isn’t impossible.”

“What?” Iron Axe exclaimed in shock, he was unable to believe his own ears. Echo, however, didn’t show much of reaction, after all, she had already let go of her hope of ever going back to Ironsand City.

“Of course, right now I’m unable to achieve it.” Roland waved his hand dismissively. He didn’t think of this idea on a whim. During Iron Axe descriptions of the Extreme South, he had heard some very interesting things – that this piece of land was hot and dry and

that the environment had many strange things to offer. Especially the orange flames coming out of the ground that had burned for decades without going out. The orange fire was often times burning above a huge pit. And at the bottom of the pit, someone could see the black Styx flowing endlessly.

Orange fire, black Styx, were both words worth mentioning. When Roland listened to this description, one question immediately popped up in his mind, wasn't he talking about oil? Even more, open-flowing oil! How important this black liquid was to the industry's development no one really had to ask. After all, more than half of modern warfare was because of the need for Oil. The rise and fall of the oil prices could even affect the rise and fall of a number of countries, and even change the patterns of the world. If he could somehow get control over the people in the south, he could maybe get a stable source of oil.

However, for now, Roland did not have the time to think about disputes happening in a faraway area, which was out of his control. So without any better option, he had to postpone the show "since in ancient times" to a later day.

"When I get hold of the throne, I will try to get justice for you." Roland went in front of the kneeling Iron Axe, "But today you violated the discipline of the First Army. From now on you are sentenced to two days of confinement, during these two days, you will reflect on your wrong doings."

"Yes, Your Highness," Iron Axe returned excitedly.

"Then let us continue the training," said Roland to the Knight,

“and you will also be responsible for the next march.”

Bryan thought that today’s training had already come to its end, but everyone was still sitting on their place in the driving range, no one dared to disperse on their own.

After all, before Carter left with the Prince, he gave them the order to rest where they were, but not to dissolve.

What should he do, if he had to wait until the time of his patrol, he didn’t want to imagine such a scenario.

“Sir Knight, you said that Captain Iron Axe won’t come back?” asked Nail, who was in the same group as Brian himself, “His unexpected action just now nearly gave me a heart attack.”

“How many times have I told you already, you shouldn’t call me Sir,” Brian corrected him again, “In the First Army, you should call me group leader.” After he was knighted by His Highness, his rank within the army had become a lot of higher. It even came to the point that other people didn’t dare to talk to him, except for Nails – the little man worked as a miner before he joined the Army. He was the only one who would often come to him to talk. According to Nails story’s, don’t mention that he dared to talk with a knight, he even said that he’d had close conversations with His Highness.

“This kind of thing... His Royal Highness won’t blame him too excessively, right?” Although he gave him a reassuring answer, but

the wariness in his heart didn't want to quell down. Once he had seen a civilian who accidentally collided with the occupants of a carriage and afterwards got stabbed to death by the guards on the spot, such a tragedy.

Even so, Iron Axe came from another country, it was still very daring to kneel in front of another woman when His Highness stood directly beside him. Even calling her "Patriarch", adding all this together was a big break of etiquette.

"I guess that will be the case," nodded Nail. "I've spoken to His Royal Highness personally, he isn't like the other nobles, uh..." He scratched his head and seemed to try to find the right words. "Even though they almost look the same as him, they act totally different."

Brian also didn't want Iron Axe to be punished too hard. After more than one month of collective training, he already felt a deep sense of admiration for this foreigner. Especially when he taught them how to build a tent for the case in which they happen to be stranded in the wild. They all benefitted from the superb skills he patiently taught to them. In the eyes of the Knight, Iron Axe was even more suited to be the Commander of the First Army than Carter was.

"They're back!" Nail brushed against Brian's arm, "Hey, I can't detect Iron Axe within their group."

No, it was time to stop his imagination from running wild, Carter had already ordered them to line up, according to how they had previously trained. When they were ready, His Highness stepped

in front of them and began his speech: “The woman beside me is another witch, her name is Echo. She and Iron Axe had been separated before for many years... According to the rules, Iron Axe was sentenced to days of confinement for disrupting the formation and violating the military discipline. No, I will repeat it once more, you all now belong to the regular army, and the most important rule for a member of this army is to always obey orders and maintain the discipline! Can you understand this?”

“Yes! Your Royal Highness!” Brian like the others shouted his consent. When he had heard that Iron Axe was sentenced to confinement, his heart was finally able to calm down and when he looked in Nails direction, the other one made a wry face.

“During the following training, we will use her ability to simulate a variety of sounds, including musical instruments like horns and drums. She will play several kinds of marching songs, which will be your command to act! Everyone will move in accordance with the drums, always holding the same rhythm, keeping the team in one line.” Here, His Royal Highness paused, “On the battlefield, Echo will always stand behind you. You can think of her as the banner of the First Army, and you have to always protect her with everything you have! Now that I’ve finished saying all this... everyone should become familiar with the next tunes.”

What is a Marching Song? Brian’s head was full of confusion, is it something like the music I occasionally hear when I visit a pub? This kind of soft music should be able to motivate you to move forward?

But when he heard the melody coming out of Echo’s mouth, he

realized that he had never heard something like this before. He almost instantly understood the meaning behind His Royal Highness words – the rhythm of the drum directly went into his bones, giving him the desire to move his feet, while at the same time the light melody was provoking his desire to fight.

– This so-called marching song, hearing this it would boost everyone on the battlefield, it was a “Battle Hymn” to encourage everyone to keep on unceasingly moving forward.

Chapter 110 - Battle Of Eagle City (Part 1)

Through the misty morning fog, Timothy Wimbledon could vaguely see some flags fluttering in the wind at the top of the city's towers that were in front of him.

He raised his gaze, trying to identify the emblem that was depicted on the banner. The sailboat with a crown pattern on top of a green foundation undoubtedly belonged to his sister, Garcia Wimbledon. It was the city's largest banner.

The second banner had a white background and the image of a snake twisting around a pagoda. This emblem belonged to the Bayer Family. When Timothy had first became aware of this flag, a feeling of contempt had risen up within his heart. But even after they came and seek refuge under the protection of the Queen of Clearwater, they still had enough pride that they'd hung their banner above the city, they were simply too brazen. Wait until I catch you, I will make you eat your own flag, Earl Bayer, he thought.

Finally, there was the Red Lion Tower, belonging to the equally shameless Sheet Family. Outwardly, Timothy appeared expressionless, but inside his heart, he had already condemned Elin Sheet to death. It was also the same for Toman Bayer. Of course, both of them would get their very own banner to eat.

"Sir Neiman, lift my banner, the banner of the Kingdom of Graycastle," Timothy ordered.

“As you command, Your Majesty.” Agreed knight Linden, and then rushed in the direction of the troops behind them “Long live the King, raise the flag!”

The newly crowned king turned around and saw his banner being raised. The gray flag was waving in the wind. The black pattern on it looked stately and awe-inspiring, it had a huge tower with two crossed spears on both sides depicted on it. This was the emblem of the King of Graycastle.

“Under this banner, I will condemn all traitors for their crimes against the throne.”

The moment Timothy received the news of Garcia’s declaration of independence, he had immediately taken action to show her his answer – he had mobilized all of his troops together with the troops of the Eastern Duke, and given them the order to attack Eagle City. Although his self-confidence had clearly been shaken by Garcia’s unexpectedly fast action. However, on the surface he seemed to remain calm, this greatly increased the faith that all his supporting minister had in him.

He needed nearly a month before his summoned vassals and their troops could be gathered. Then it had taken a week to get to the East, from there they again needed half a month to reach their destination.

It was only yesterday evening when the sun was already on its way down that Timothy had finally arrived in Eagle City. Fortunately, the Months of the Demons hadn’t affected their march; the road to the South hadn’t been blocked by the snow, his

situation was almost the opposite of that in Border Town. The roads had became even stronger thanks to the cold temperature thereby allowing his carriages carrying the food and his soldiers to move faster than usual.

Timothy's team was very large. The forces were put together mostly from his own guards, the Knights of King City and the special forces from the Duke of the Eastern Border, Duke Frances. Together they numbered six thousand men, divided into three battalions, of which a thousand men belonged to the well-trained and well-equipped rank of knights. According to the reliable intelligence he had been able to gather, he knew that the size of Garcia's troops was less than three thousand people, and most of them belonged to the rank of Clearwater Port's free people. They were usually former farmers and businessmen who had just grabbed the nearest weapon they could reach. They would never realy be a threat to his genuine knights.

When his Finance Minister Sir Arthur Golddess had become aware of Timothy's battle plans, he had immediately raised objections. So shortly after the end of the Months of the Demons, the farming operation would become the highest priority, if the farmers were to be recruited into his troops, it would later affect the harvest.

Acknowledging this objection, Timothy didn't require his vassals to deploy their serfs, instead, they had to convene the freedmen in their territory and send them so that they could take over the responsibility for the delivery and logistics. As a result, even if they were to fight in the South, it wouldn't affect the harvest in the fall.

From Timothy's perspective, no matter what he had to do, in the end, Garcia could not be allowed to stay in the south of his kingdom any longer.

Eagle City wasn't a well-developed city. After all, previously it was only a marketplace situated in the middle of the surrounding towns. But later, just less than a century ago, with the increase of its importance to the surrounding towns, it slowly developed into a city. Because of the previous Lord's plans to further promote the importance of its market, he decided to not build any insurmountable walls.

How strong could an army of three thousand civilians together with the men from two Earls possibly be? So, the sooner Timothy started his counter measures, the better were his odds for him to win. If he was to give her even a little breathing space, she would quickly take over the whole of the Southern territory, making it very difficult for him to push her back.

After a night's rest and a good meal, his troops were now ready to fight. The sun gradually turned from a weak orange into a ball of shining gold, dispersing the morning fog. Soon Timothy could see Eagle City's earth-colored walls – in the eyes of the new King, they didn't deserve to be called walls. At best, they could be called an earthen slope. From the bottom to the top of the slope, it was just a ramp. Even without a siege ladder, his troops would still be able to directly climb it on foot. Furthermore, the slope only had a height of one person and just enough thickness to accommodate one person on top of it. While this so-called wall was good enough to block refugees and bandits, it would never be able to stop his heavily armed soldiers.

It seemed the city walls were only very sparsely manned, apparently they weren't ready to defend the wall.

"Your Majesty, the cavalry which was in charge of observing the South Gate have came back to report. They finally saw a group of men and horses moving." Reported knight Linden, who ran back to the King while leading his horse by hand.

Timothy turned in the direction of Duke Frances and said with a knowing look, "It looks like she wants to run."

Duke Frances took a careful look for himself and nodded, "That is most probably true, and can be considered a decisive action on her part. Eagle City isn't suitable for a siege, if she tried to defend this city with her troops, it will only become a clear victory for us."

"It turned out the same as you had expected during the combat meeting last night, she really did not expect us to react so fast," he laughed.

"We arrived at just the right time," Timothy said. "She was unable to move at night, even if she had wanted to."

"You are correct, a march during night-time is a big taboo. If she really had done it, and we then took the initiative to attack, her troops would easily collapse. And once the troops collapse during the night, they will seldom have the chance to gather again. Even if she was able to flee back to Clearwater Port, it would only be delaying the inevitable.

"So, my dear sister had to wait until the morning to order the troops to retreat." Timothy looked with satisfaction at the Castle of Eagle City, which seemed to be waiting for him to take it. It has to be hard on her, after all she has done, yet it didn't turn out as she expected.

Garcia was too fond of the symbolic status of Eagle City, and the possibilities she felt when she stationed troops here – when holding the mansion of the guardian of the southern border, it would indeed be easier to conquer the hearts of the southern nobility. But the benefits were also accompanied by its own risk. Timothy had intentionally sent a slow moving diversionary army along the way, while at the same time rushing with a division of cavalry to the East, without any infantry.

The needed rations were transported by cart, which were following them. When they arrived at the Duke's mansion they took the rest of the cavalry with them. From there they bypassed Eagle City and neared the city from the opposite side. The first mission of the cavalry was to block all roads, reducing the ability for the spies to pass on messages.

But such big military activity was impossible to hide forever, Garcia should have gotten the news of their attack two to three days earlier than their actual approach. So that when they started their retreat this morning, it could be considered as a hasty move. Retreating from Eagle City to Clearwater would take one day on foot. So even if they ran on their two legs, Timothy could still easily overtake them with his thousand men strong cavalry unit and easily kill them, which would naturally lead to the collapse of her ridiculous armies.

Unfortunately, as long as she threw her three thousand troops away, Garcia still had a chance to escape from Timothy's clutches by leaving the city on her own by horse. Like this, staying alive and returning to the Port of Clearwater wouldn't be difficult.

Even in the case that she was able to flee, I would still have ended this farce, he thought.

"Your Majesty, according to the previously drawn up plan we should separate now," said Duke Frances, "You will wait for me in the inner city after you bypassed the city and attacked from the South Gate, right? And if we run into strong resistance or get cut off we will take a detour."

"I still think it's better if I attack from the southwest," Timothy answered, "For us knights, it isn't easy to move in the narrow streets, and Garcia may also obstruct our troops from moving forward by blocking the streets with lots of debris. Even if we have to take a detour and fight into the night, we won't let ourselves be prevented from chasing them down and slaughtering them."

"Then I'm out, Your Majesty."

"Be careful," Timothy reminded him, "Even if Garcia didn't leave any troops in the city, she could still have left behind many traps. In addition, be aware of the narrow streets, there might still be many people left in the houses. Only waiting for the right time to ambush you, so slay everyone you find, you can't leave any threat to your safety alive."

“Ha ha ha,” Duke Frances frankly laughed, “Your Majesty please rest assured, I have followed you father into many battles, I have personally cut off hundreds of heads and until now I have never been hurt.” He waved with his hand and signaled the guard beside him to move, “Everyone, attack!”

The troops behind him got ready, split into several smaller formations that were under the leadership of other knights and started to move in the direction of Eagle city – the troops in the frontline were made up out of the freedmen, followed by the armored mercenaries, that were the main force in the siege. While the Duke’s knights were fully focused on his commands.

When the main force began to hit the walls, Timothy led the rest of the knights and their squires in the southwestern direction.

Chapter 111 - Battle Of Eagle City (Part 2)

The first batch of freedmen who served as the human meat shields didn't meet any resistance and were able to successfully climb the earthen slope.

On top of the ramp formed from earth's slope, the defenders had built a wooden fence to block the attacking forces. The fence wasn't completely closed, instead, it had many openings for spears. During the time the attackers were busy destroying the logs of the fence, the defenders could simply stand behind it and use their spears to kill the enemy.

However, contrary to Duke Frances expectations, the defenders who should have been standing behind the fence were nowhere to be seen. The entire wall was currently in an unguarded state. So his vanguards carrying their axes were able to quickly open up some gaps in the wall. After the logs were out of the way, the rush towards the city began. A moment later, the wooden gate was also opened.

"Let's go," said the Duke, and shook the reins of his horse and led the rest of his troops to the gates. From the beginning of the siege until when the gates were opened, less than thirty minutes have passed, so what the hell was Garcia Wimbledon doing?

Frances frowned, even if she didn't have much combat experience, she should still have known that she had to leave a small group of personal guards or hired mercenaries who had been bought with a lot of money and didn't fear death behind to block the enemy's offensive for as long as possible. Only in this way

could she gain enough time for the larger group to flee.

The 3rd Princess is clearly not a stupid person. Otherwise, it could not be explained why she was able to take over the South so quickly. So why hadn't she arranged for any men to defend the wall? Building a solid defense, even with well-placed traps in it, but with no one to operate it, is only a waste of money. Frances thought, it's decided now, my personal guards will be the first group to step into the city and investigate whether the situation is safe.

But later, when the captain of his personal guards came back to report, he reported that even within the city it was still the same situation, they hadn't met any resistance. However, there were indeed some wood and stone obstacles, but after his men had ordered the local inhabitants to work, those were soon removed.

Hearing this report, Frances no longer hesitated and began to lead his remaining troops towards Eagle City. He had followed King Wimbledon III on many campaigns during the years and could be counted as a veteran, so how could he let himself be scared off by a little girl? Contrary to what one might expect the time invested into analyzing the enemy's steps for mistakes was not wasted. Because if he could wait until all the gates were captured, he could directly ride through the city and save a lot of time.

When he stepped through the gate, Duke Frances could smell something with a pungent smell. It wasn't the smell of rotting corpses which often appeared on battlefields, but rather more like a mixture of pine nut oil, tangerine peel, and incense. If someone

took a deep breath, they could even imagine it to be a perfume.

What is this smell? But when he observed his surroundings once more, he was unable to detect anything unusual. The only thing which didn't seem right was that the ditch for the drainage system was blocked, and the sewage was overflowing out of its channel, slowly flowing along the ground. It had accumulated so much filth that he couldn't tell how long it was that they hadn't been cleaned, but when the sun fell on these dark substances, it reflected in five splendid colors.

Probably the smell comes from this pile of sewage, Frances shook his head, clearing it of this unnecessary thought, then began to lead his unit further to the castle district.

Since they took over Eagle City, they naturally had to go to the Castle and the City Hall, and look to see if there was worth looting. Of course, it was very likely that Garcia had already plundered the city, so there shouldn't be many gold royals left, but some of the larger crafts and ornaments were also very suitable trophies. Exactly for this occupation Frances had brought his own food carriages along. Regardless of the condition of the loot, everything would be loaded on the carriages. As for those mercenaries, most probably they were already looting the shops and the surrounding farms.

Well, for now, this doesn't matter. It's more important that Duke Joey is already dead, and it's still unsure who will become his successor. So at this time it's a close battle, to decide under whose rule this city will fall.

When Duke Frances entered the castle, he thought that he had come to the wrong place.

From the outside it appears to be the castle, he thought. But they hadn't only taken all of the coins, no, they had cleared out the entire basement. They took all of the clothes and didn't even leave behind a single corn in the grain storage. The several frescoes hanging on the walls were also all taken, leaving only blank walls behind. There were no longer any books in the bookcases and they also hadn't forgotten to take the bed from the Lord's bedroom either. In short, the whole castle had been stripped clean.

Was this something that was done in a hasty retreat? Frances gradually became more uneasy. If this hadn't been planned out from the start, the castle wouldn't have been cleared so thoroughly.

Right at the moment he wanted to go to the City Hall to see if was the same situation over there, a thick smoke suddenly began to emerge through the North Gate.

“What’s the matter, is something burning?”

“I do not know, Your Excellency, I have already ordered Moliere to go and take a look,” the Captain of his guard answered. “Perhaps it’s a fire that has been deliberately set by the enemy.”

Yes, that must be the case. The Duke's first thought was that this all was a trap, but then he realized that this method of setting the gates on fire was meaningless. After all, they could easily bypass

the gates, they only had to cross the slope and then they were already outside. Setting something on fire, without any additional attack was meaningless, after all, an organized team wouldn't need much time to put the fire out.

The correct use of this tactic would be to set up soldiers at the inner side of the walls, who would wait until the fire had expanded all over the city, and then when the enemy's troops started to panic that would be the time for their own surprise attack to start. If it was done like this, it can easily disrupt the enemy's formation, maybe even force them to retreat. But as he had said before, with no one to operate the trap, it was meaningless.

At this moment, out of the direction of the three other gates, black smoke also began to emerge. And when he looked back at the fire at the North Gate he could see that it was spreading at much too fast a rate; as if the whole surroundings had been filled with straw. It didn't take long until the first cries from the civilians could be heard, indicating that some of their houses were already lit.

This can't be right... Duke Frances thought, the fire is coming from the north gate, but there was nothing with which to feed the fire, there was only an open space! But if there was nothing, how can the fire spread so fast? Wait... suddenly a horrifying thought popped up within his mind, could it be that Garcia Wimbledon had secretly recruited a witch?

Frances reassuringly touched the God's Stone of Retaliation which hung around his neck, calming quickly beating heart. Hopefully, it is only a fire ignited by a witch, as long as that is the

case I can directly walk through it. After all, with this stone that demonic fire simply cannot hurt me. And furthermore each member of my personal guards is also wearing this thing, so this fire can't threaten us at all. As for the freedmen, who have no money to donate to the church, I just don't have the time to attend to them.

Regardless of the fact that he possessed such a stone, the city had still become dangerous, so he decided to flee to the war camp at the South Gate. From there he could not only monitor Eagle City, but also wait for the new King to return with the cavalry. When he thought his next steps through, he immediately gave the Captain of his guards the command: "We will leave the city through the South Gate, during the ride you will blow the horn to gather all of our troops."

"As you command!"

Everyone immediately went on their way, but when their group came near the South Gate, the flames had begun to cover the whole city, already setting many civilian houses on fire. The heat emitting from the fire became so hot that they were forced to retreat. In addition, the commoners who were originally hiding inside their houses behind closed doors, were now on the streets and fleeing from the flames. Crowding the whole streets with people. They became so many, that even the sword swinging knights were unable to move forward. There was nothing which would help against this panic stricken people fleeing to the only open space available which wasn't burning yet. At this moment it seemed as if everything would be consumed by the surrounding flames and smoke.

“Everyone calm down; we have to get to the well. From it we can draw water to fight this fire,” Duke Frances quickly gave some orders, “Don’t try to save the houses, they are out of control. Just extinguish the burning obstacles on the streets, so that we get a path out of the city. Don’t stop the horn signal, let other people know where we are!”

“Sir!” shouted a knight who came from the direction of the city center. The knight didn’t even wait until his horse had stopped, instead, he immediately jumped off the horse. When he took a closer look he discovered that it was the knight sent to the North Gate by his Captain. “Sir, at the North Gate we are unable to get the fire under control!”

“What did you say?” Frances couldn’t believe it, so he had to ask again, “You are unable to fight the fire?”

“The flames are burning on this black water,” she said quickly, “Not only is it not extinguished with water, it is even quickly spreading over it, and now the whole northern city is burning!”

“An immortal fire,” Frances murmured, “Yes, it has to be demonic fire.” And then the Duke shouted, “Do not panic! This is Garcia taking advantage of the ability of this evil witches! As long as you wear God’s Stone of Retaliation you’re safe! Even if these flames seem frightening, they simply cannot hurt you!”

“So that’s the reason, you were so benevolent.” Moliere subconsciously stroked her chest, “Sir, what should we do?”

“With the God’s Stone of Retaliation we don’t need to fear anything! Everyone launch, we will break through!” The Duke waved his hand, “These demonic fire as long as we wear the God’s Stone of Retaliation, it will disappear without a trace!” He paused, “Moliere, you will lead the first group of people out, I will stay here and wait for the people who are still coming.”

The female knight nodded in confirmation, “Sir, you have to take care of yourself, pay attention that you don’t!”

Then she turned around and rushed without any hesitation towards the raging fire at the end of the street.

Chapter 112 - Battle Of Eagle City (Part 3)

It seemed as if the King's knights were holding a sharp silver blade when they cut into the rear of Garcia's retreating troops.

The crowd broke into chaos and a lot of people fell to the ground while they were trying to flee, only to end up getting trampled to death by the horses.

Occasionally some of them pulled out weapons and tried to resist the attackers, but against the superior knights they were soon cut into pieces. Leading this kind of unstoppable flood was an elite knight from the camp in the Cold Wind Ridge. It was Knight Naimen who served as the spear point for this attack. Furthermore, his blue cloak which danced in the wind behind him was particularly eye-catching, wherever he went, the enemy would try to flee. Every time after his sword cut down, it would be covered in blood.

Timothy Wimbledon instead stood in the distance on a small hill, overlooking the whole battlefield. At this point, the three thousand people of Garcia's troops were no longer able to hold together their formation, instead with every second they were falling further and further apart, which brought them to almost completely halting their march.

They won't last much longer, Timothy thought, the moment when the second of my three teams attacks they will collapse. These people simply cannot resist the assault of Graycastle's elite knights. Most of them aren't even wearing any armor, the moment a sharp blade comes close to them, they immediately start losing

their will to fight.

Everything happened almost exactly as he had expected, after spending one hour to bypass Eagle City, they had turned over and rode through a sparse forest, finally reaching the road. Back on the road, Timothy ordered his knights to start rushing, and finally, one hour later they were able to catch up with Garcia.

According to the advice of Duke Frances, Timothy divided his troop into three teams of around three hundred knights, and let them take turns in attacking the different sides of the enemy. Like this, he was able to hold some troops back and was always ready to send in reinforcements when it was needed. In order to avoid the possibility that they might get surrounded, his knights were not allowed to attack the center of the enemy's formation and instead they should attack its flanks. With short speedy dashes, they only cut off the leftovers, with each charge killing only dozens of people.

This tactic was obviously very successful, after a few runs the enemy already had more than a hundred casualties, while still being unable to even retaliate. They even tried to organize a counterattack with their own cavalry, but the gap between their equipment and training was just too far off. Compared to the Knights of the King, the momentary patchwork of cavalry was nothing more than a group of horseback-riding infantry. The moment when they came face to face, those "cavalry" made of the men that had been brave enough to charge into battle were simply killed, or if they were lucky they were able to scatter in all directions.

This unilateral massacre was a great blow to the enemy's morale, and soon Timothy noticed some of Garcia's troops begun to break away from the formation and flee in all directions.

The time has finally come for us to launch our main offensive, he thought. When the Cold Wind Knight came back from leading his attack, Timothy didn't order him to start the next round of shock tactics, instead, he signaled him to come over to his side.

"Your Majesty, their formation will soon come falling apart," Naimen wiped the sweat from his forehead away, whilst leaving some bloody marks on his face as he did - naturally it was the blood of his enemies, until now he hadn't received any injuries during the whole battle.

Seeing this, Timothy took his own handkerchief and handed it to him. "Well done, you can take a break now, it's finally time to deliver the deathblow."

Seeing that the next round of shock attack wasn't coming in, Garcia's troops also realized that the decisive moment was coming. Her large group completely stopped their forward march, instead, they unhurriedly gathered, until they had formed a tight formation. Every outermost soldier was holding a wooden pike, and held it up, waiting for the impact.

Discovering this, Timothy only scoffed, in his eyes, it was nothing more than an already dying man's last struggle. Without barricades, without armor, only with flesh and blood alone you want to resist the mighty impact of my knights? This can only end in disaster for you. No matter which cards you have left my dear

younger sister, you won't be able to change the outcome. Naturally, it could also be true that you have already departed long ago, leaving this group to die and buying time for yourself to flee.

But he soon discovered he had been wrong.

Within the crowd, they once again put up the banner of the Queen of Clearwater. Seeing this green banner with the sailing boat and the crown fluttering in the wind, made Timothy frown. So he lifted his binocular and took a closer look at the enemy. He soon discovered standing behind the warriors who had raised the flag was the blurred figure of a woman who seemed to be shouting some orders. Even so, he couldn't clearly see the other one's face, yet her gray hair flowing in the wind gave her identity away.

Garcia Wimbledon, had not run.

Timothy took a deep breath, well, this only means that this farce will come to an end here. I don't have to follow her to Clearwater Port.

After waiting for the horses to be fully rested, the new King gave the signal to start the main attack.

The cavalry formed from the knights and squires was around eight-hundred strong, and under the leadership of the King's own knights, started the attack against the enemy. It was once more the Cold Wind Knight who was at the tip of the attack – Naimen Moor.

Just at the moment when the attack would finally hit, suddenly on both sides of the horizon, a huge numbers of troops appeared. After sending out strange war cries, they immediately began to rush into the direction of the battle.

Timothy couldn't believe what his eyes were showing him.

Without raising any flags or wearing any emblems, the suddenly emerged troops didn't resemble any known force of the kingdom. After a closer observation, Timothy saw that they were all wearing different armors and weapons. But with their high-stature and weird faces, Timothy knew, they could only be from one place.

The Sandpeople from the Extreme South!

He didn't need to guess any longer if they were friend or foe, without a doubt, Garcia was able to make a deal with them. Leading this group of damn foreigners into the Kingdom of Graycastle. Only the thought of what this meant made Timothy burn with rage, he immediately shouted: "Give the signal, break off the attack!"

But it was already too late, such a high-speed assault was impossible to be broken up with such a short notice. His knights were directly impaling into the heart of Garcia's troops, cutting through them like a hot knife through butter, with only one goal, reaching the Queen of Clearwater.

Timothy eagerly looked into the direction of the flying banner, hoping that it would break – the troops of the Sandpeople coming

from both sides were each around one thousand men strong, making Garcia's forces five thousand people strong. This was a size that Timothy was unable to face. Furthermore, the Sandpeople had a strong build and were always warring against each other which had turned them into a great threat even to his knights. Only by killing the enemy's leader, cutting off their flagpole and breaking Garcia's forces, would he have still a chance of winning.

However, even so, the flagpole swayed a bit but it was still standing straight.

Finally, the Sandpeople were able to close the circle, blocking the knight's last way out and started joining the battle.

Without these reinforcements, Garcia's three thousand desperados would have been defeated long ago. But at the moment, they were still persisting, and just like a swamp, swallowing one knight after another.

Hearing the horns blowing to retreat, the knights who were closer to the edge were trying to free themselves came rushing back to the King. But many of them had ridden too deep into the enemy's forces and were now trapped, including the Cold Wind Knight.

Currently, he was fighting against a nine feet tall warrior of the Sandpeople while breathing heavily. The other side was waving around a wooden stick as long as two men causing a small area to open up around their fight. Unfortunately, Naimen's mount had already been crushed to death, and it was only thanks to his extraordinary reaction and agility that he was able to stay alive.

But without a mount, his heavy armor lead to a rapid consumption of his physical strength. And when he once more stepped sideways trying to dodge, his foot slipped and he was hit by the stick in the middle of his chest. The strength of the attack that came hitting against his armor was so huge that it broke into two pieces.

His blue cloak swayed once more through the wind before he finally disappeared in the crowd.

Half an hour later, the knights who were still left fighting had become less and less and when the Sandpeople turned in the direction of Timothy's hill, he grit his teeth and gave the order to withdraw. His entire group of people began their retreat northward. Compared with the huge force he had previously led into battle, the new King now merely had three hundred people still left around him.

Chapter 113 - Warning

Since the end of the Month of the Demons, it has only rained for two days in the West, all the other days had been sunny days, apparently, this was compensation for all the snow during the winter. The musty air in the office had also been swept away, becoming fresh and clean as nature, and when he opened the windows the sweet smelling fragrance of spring would sometimes float into the room.

At this time, the road between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold had nearly been restored to its former quality. But with each passing day, Roland would become particularly more concerned about the matter with the stronghold.

Every year after the return of land traffic there would also be merchants coming to Border Town selling their fresh goods, but until today he had yet to see any merchant coming in from Longsong Stronghold. Lightning was by now flying two times a day to Longsong Stronghold, to ensure that they would have an early enough warning to be well prepared for the enemy's arrival.

Over the past week, the First Army has entered the comprehensive exercise stage, which included setting up the defensive line in order to welcome an enemy's attack and also trained in how to pursue and attack an enemy. For the former they heavily relied on Lighting to always inform them of the distance between them and the enemy, the artillery and gun teams would shoot according to her orders – making it much easier, regardless of whether it concerned giving orders or acting on given orders. For example: Shooting solid shelling at 800 meters and 500 meters, while using canister shelling when the enemy approached 300

meters, and firing with firearms at 50 meters and so on. As long as they saw Lightning raising the corresponding flag, the team leader would then give the signal to his team to attack.

The key for the victory on the battlefield laid in the pursuit and attacking stage. According to Roland's plan, when the enemy was defeated, they would turn around and retreat to Longsong Stronghold, for which they would also need to use three days. Even if the Duke fled on his own, leaving his militia and the hired mercenaries behind, he would still need two days for the journey, so he had to stay for at least one night out in the wild.

This gave the First Army the perfect chance to chase them. The whole process of monitoring would be done by Lightning, while the first army would always be out of the enemy's scouting distant but ready to catch up at any moment. The artillery and ammunition would be transported by the town's civilians. When the enemy had established their night camp, it was time for the First Army to completely encircle them, and at dawn of the next day they would start the attack, completely annihilating the opposition.

Even though the plan didn't seem complicated, it was almost impossible to coordinate the two troops because of the absence of any modern communication devices. Roland could only hope for the witches, to make up for the lack in communication. How the final result would end up, even he himself was unsure.

Another critical point was that his gunpowder reserves were running low, because of this the First Army was unable to use live ammunition during their comprehensive exercises. However, the

main goal of the training had been to increase the Gunner Team's and Artillery Team's collaboration, as well as the coordination between the First Army and the witches. Roland has sent people to go further down the Redwater River to Fallen Dragon Ridge and Redwater City, hoping to find new sources of saltpeter. If I'm unable to replenish my reserves of gunpowder, I am afraid after two more fights, the guns in the hands of the First Army could only be used as spears, Roland thought.

Roland wrote a number of items he had to procure on paper which included saltpeter, grain, seeds and other supplies, he intended to send one of Barov's apprentice to the King's City to try his luck. That place had sufficient merchandise, it especially had enough saltpeter – with the summer approaching, the King would surely have started to gather saltpeter by now. As a city filled with wealthy aristocrats and also wealthy merchants, when the weather started to get hot, the consumption of saltpeter would become staggering. He hoped to find a stable supplier who could provide Border Town with a stable stream of the raw materials needed to produce gunpowder.

Prior to this, he had already sent out two of his personal guards, one to implement the plan called "Gathering the Witches" and another to work on the "finding the fruit" program.

The former had posed as either a traveler or a businessman, and spread out through the streets and lanes, pubs and other places the rumors of Border Town being a safe haven for witches. Of course, it hadn't been said that the host was the 4th Prince himself, instead he news that spread had been that they had been able to find the Holy Mountain, and that the Witch Cooperation Association was now looking to recruit new members.

The other had gone directly to Clearwater Port, and purchased some peculiar crops from the Fjords from across the ocean. Of course, when he found any particular seeds in any of the city's on the journey, he had also sent them back.

Having finished with his purchasing list, he handed it over to Scroll, allowing her go to the Town Hall and hand it over to Barov. After Scroll left Roland stretched out his hand to drink some water, but only to discover that his cup was empty.

Just as he was about to get up and take the kettle off from the fire, Nightingale was already bringing over the pot to the table. More than that, she even smiled while she filled up the cup, and when she put the kettle back.

Roland slowly sipped his tea, while trying to think of what would have happened to make her smile like this. Recently the attitude of Nightingale was somewhat off. In the last few days she had always had a smile on her face, and even more, she was now even taking the initiative to serve him tea, does she secretly want a raise in her wages? Previously, she would only sit on the sofa while holding a pot of dried fish and gnawing on some for the whole afternoon long.

Although, Roland had already asked her what had happened, she only laughed and refuse to answer, he simply had to let the question go.

Could playing Gwent really make people so happy? Later when

he “invents” Poker and Mahjong, he could just open a casino, and the money would come in on its own... Stop. Roland shook his head, pushing the thought to the back of his head. Now wasn’t the time for pleasure seeking, he still had to consider what he would do after achieving his victory against Longsong Stronghold.

Should he perhaps relocate his office to Longsong Stronghold? Roland had considered this point for a long time, moving to a more prosperous land would seem to be quite tempting, but it wouldn’t in fact be a very good choice. Longsong Stronghold had more than a hundred year longer history than Border Town did, so there were many different forces that were struggling for power, while the other nobility also took a lot of power.

The territory was supervised along the principle to divide and conquer, even as the Lord of Longsong Stronghold it was difficult to handle matters in the territories of his subordinates. In the case that Roland would want to grasp all of this power for himself, it would be very hard to achieve without causing a revolution. Even more, it was a territory where the fish and dragons were mixed in together, so his own safety also couldn’t be guaranteed. He did not want to walk in the streets while always having to fear that a radical aristocrat would attempt an assassination.

Compared to this, Border Town was completely different. Here only he had the final say, the surrounding land was vast, so he wasn’t in an urgent need to expand his territory. Most of the people were either miners or hunters, or all from the same social rank, and with his success during the Month of the Demons, his reputation among the people has greatly risen. Most importantly, after the integration of the First Army and their propaganda, most of the people have accepted the existence of witches. When

compared with Longsong Stronghold or other cities where the Church had a lot of influence, Border Town was much easier to turn into the witches' safe haven. Therefore, Roland decided to use Border Town as his core area.

As for the fortress, he decided to let others manage it on his behalf and that he would only be there to provide support from afar. After all, as long as they provided him with a steady flow of work force as well as paying taxes, he would be satisfied. What he was missing the most of at the moment was people and money.

So Roland's consideration for Longsong Stronghold was that they would provide him with the coins and the people for the continued construction of Border Town. Like this, the gold royals from the defeated nobles would return back to the hands of the commoners, who would then use it in the markets of Longsong Stronghold, from where he would get the money back in form of taxes. In addition, maybe he could through a number of preferential policies to convince some people with special skills to stay for the long term in Border Town.

But all these were still only some rough plans. Things such as who would administer Longsong Stronghold in his stead, or the specifics of the taxation system, would have to wait until the end of the battle to be considered.

At this moment, a figure in yellow suddenly flew through the window only to stop beside the prince's table – this figure was Lightning.

“You've worked hard, have a drink first,” Roland took his cup

and gave it to her. She took the cup from him but she didn't drink, instead she only shouted, "Your Highness, they are coming!"

Chapter 114 - Thunder

The vast amount of Longsong Stronghold's allied forces were on march to Border Town.

The front of the force was comprised out of the six knight families in the stronghold. From the various armors that the knights were wearing, it was easy to determine how strong each family was when compared to the others. Without a doubt the most eye-catching amongst them were Duke Ryan's knights, their horses were a branch of the King's breed of short-tailed horses, which were exceptionally good at long distance running and had a larger body than that of other horses. Yet even with how amazing the horses seemed, the Knights sitting on their backs seemed even more powerful, their armor was created by the famous Longsong Stronghold "Hammer and Dragontooth" blacksmith which gave them a unified look. On their thick breastplates was carved a huge and shiny silver lion's head, while on their shoulders were pictured two wolves, which seemed to be opening their mouth to let out a roar. Their cloaks which were waving behind them in the wind was embroidered with delicately decorative designs, and around their waist, every one of them had also tied a red band.

These knights were not only eye-catching. Each year after the end of the Months of Demons, it was exactly these knights who were responsible for cleaning up the remnants of demonic beasts and ensuring that it was once more safe to travel through the land. Every one of them had accumulated a wealth of combat experience when fighting one on one, they weren't much worse than the Knights of the King were, they were just less in numbers – of course, as a Duke, being able to support one hundred and fifty elite knights, was already an amazing feat.

So when Duke Ryan looked at his knights, he always had a very satisfied expression. Never doubting for a moment that there was no one in the West who had enough strength to stop him.

Walking in the middle of the retinue were the mercenaries, their equipment when compared with the knights was much worse. The majority of their attire was some out-fashioned mail or plate armor lacking either the gloves or helmets. There were even some people who were only equipped in cheap leather armor and they were also wearing all kinds of different weapons. While walking along the road they didn't hold to any formation, but were rather always walking in small groups of twos or threes, often times even laughing as they went. Seeing this, one could have the feeling that they weren't on their way to battle but instead seemed to be going out on a hike during the spring.

At the end of the line, walking behind the mercenaries were the freedmen who had been pressured into service by the Lord, dragging a single wheel cart behind them which was loaded with food and tents. Due to the difference in the movement speed of the 1,500 people which resulted in a very slow moving retinue, the knights riding at the front would have to stop from time to time and wait for the troops behind them to keep up.

“Sir,” Count Elk, Holger Medela pulled the reins of his horse so that he could directly ride side by side with the Duke, “We are half a day away from the border town, if we continue at this pace we should arrive there by 4 p.m. At that time, it would be the best if we let our troops rest for the night, then tomorrow morning we will start the attack, or do you perhaps want to attack the Prince's castle immediately?”

“It seems you want to sleep in the wild, too,” the Duke laughed, “I myself would prefer to sleep in the castle’s bed rather than the wet mud. Of course, we still have to give the Royal Family a little respect. So, when we arrive at Border Town, I will send messengers to persuade the Prince to surrender.”

Count Honeysuckle riding slightly in front of them, turned around and said, “The cavalry has already spent a whole day out in the field, the people and the horses are tired, so starting a direct attack wouldn’t be very appropriate, right? After all, even though he only has miners and hunters, it is still a fact that Roland Wimbledon was able to spend the all of the Months of the Demons inside Border Town. I think it would be for the best if we remain a bit cautious.”

“Haha, I can understand that others don’t know it, but that even you don’t know the truth about the demonic beasts? My old friends. They are really scary when met in the wild, they move fast and nimble and have astonishing strength, in other words they are deadly opponents. But if you’re standing behind a wall, then they are just stupid beasts” The Count of the elk family shrugged, “I was more surprised with that he could build a wall so quickly. But with that alone he cannot resist the might of our knights, correct? They aren’t mindless idiots.”

“That is exactly the case, and I have also received a message from the North,” Duke Ryan casually said, “This year in Hermes they’d had to deal with an unusually large force of demonic beasts, almost resulting in the fall of the New Holy City. So thinking about this logically, it seems that this year’s demonic beasts were mostly directed in their direction, and here at the West Border we’d only

had to deal with the few that have slipped through the net.”

As the Lord of the whole western territory of the kingdom, his eyes were not only concentrated in this remote place. Through these years he had placed many eyes in all of the major cities who continually passed him all the newest information. But at the moment, the tragic war in the North wasn't the place where his main focus laid. A few days ago he had received a secret letter from Steep Cliff City, which informed him that the new King Timothy Wimbledon and the Queen of Clearwater have held a fierce fight within the southern territory of Eagle City. According to the news, Timothy's team should need a month to return from Eagle City.

The letter hadn't mentioned the result of the fight, in it had only stood that after Timothy had come back to Steep Cliff City, he had lost thousands of troops, which had made it impossible for him to keep up the blockade against his sister. It also seemed that Eagle City had become a victim of the fire, the black clouds of smoke had almost covered the whole sky, this spectacle had all been witnessed by the residents of the surrounding towns.

Without a doubt, regardless of whether the Queen of Clearwater had died to the hands of Timothy or not, such a painful loss of soldiers was a serious blow to the new King. The content of the letter had made Duke Ryan so restless that he had on that very night sent out many trusted aides to King's City and also into the Eastern territory, hoping to learn more about Timothy's circumstances. Perhaps this large battle between the two Monarchs would give him the opportunity to destroy the still unstable regime of the new King, he absolutely did not mind throwing a torch on an already prepared bonfire.

If he wanted to become an independent King, now was the best chance he would ever get. The soldiers of the North were buried under the feet of the New Holy City, the South has just experienced a war and was still lying on the ground while licking their wounds, the East Border Lords and the new King weren't in a better situation either. But he was afraid that in a few years they would come back into power. As long as he got some people to attack the North, it could easily tear the Kingdom of Graycastle in half. By then the territory and population under his rule would be comparable to that of the Kingdom of Eternal Winter in the North. With the two biggest cities in the south-east under his control his strength would be comparable with everyone else's in the Kingdom of Graycastle.

And he, Osmond Ryan, would become the first King in this new country.

After he thought everything through, the Duke smiled in satisfaction. He wanted to end this farce with the Prince today and tomorrow he would immediately go back home. Fortunately, three days later I will be able to welcome my trusted aides back to the castle, hopefully, they will have some good news for me.

As the sun gradually went downwards, approaching the top of the mountains, Duke Ryan could finally make out the outline of Border Town... and outside of the town, he saw a number of densely packed silhouettes.

"Father, Duke," Rene, who was in charge of the leading the front, came back to report "The people in front of us should be the guards of the 4th Prince, they are all armed, clearly showing that they

don't intend to welcome us.

"Well, at least we don't have to bother with going to the castle to ask him to surrender," the Count laughed, "Inform the knights they should slow down and should stop at a distance close enough for a charge."

"Yes, Father," after receiving his orders, Rene turned around and left.

Duke Ryan raised his view and looked at his opponents. The guards in front of him all looked very strange, they were also holding strange weapons, they stood side by side in two lines. If you were to call their weapons pikes that would mean that the pikes did not have the correct ends, and the grip was also too short. Moreover, his counterparts adopting the disposition of trained troops was also against any common sense... their line of defense was so thin, weren't they running with open eyes into their own death?

This made the Duke a little confused. Even if the Prince has no common sense or any battle experience to speak of, he still has some knights and also his personal guards by his side, aren't they able to prevent him from making such a mess? Thinking about for a moment, the Duke decided that he would let the mercenaries lead the charge, while the cavalry would stand aside, and remain ready to start their charge at any moment.

Of course, he would still send out a messenger, to try persuading the prince. "Go over and tell the Prince that I don't have the intention of hurting him," Duke Ryan said, "but I still have an

obligation the new King's order, they won't be harmed if they put their weapons down without resistance. On his way back to the King's City I will treat him according to the treatment of nobles."

Getting his army into formation was a very slow process, first was the cavalry, they went one after the other onto their positions, while the mercenaries were slowly taking their position at the fore. But at this moment, Duke Ryan suddenly saw four short flashes of fire in the enemy's camp – first came a flash of light, then there appeared some smoke. He frowned, thinking that there might be something wrong. He even thought about taking out his binocular but then suddenly a series of thunder like noises exploded near to his ear!

Chapter 115 - War For Border Town (Part 1)

When the enemy finally entered his field of vision, Van'er immediately noticed the heavily armed knights who were riding on huge horses, wearing bright and dazzling armor and slowly riding towards Border Town. It was usually the case that the rank of a knight was much higher than that of the common town's people, and when he was suddenly confronted with about one hundred of these, he had to take some deep breaths to calm himself.

Van'er felt how his palms became sweaty, it was just like the time on the wall when he had to face the demonic beasts for the first time, but this time he faced creatures that were the same species as himself – the joined forces of Longsong Stronghold's Nobility.

No, That's wrong. He angrily spat out and threw his former thought aside, You think they're the same as yourself? When have the nobles ever treated you as if you were of the same species as themselves? He asked himself mockingly.

The only goal of their trip is to snatch Border Town away from us and bring the Northern Slope Mine back under their control. More importantly, they even intend to drive His Royal Highness out of the western territory, as a member of the First Army I cannot simply allow this.

During yesterday's pre-war lecture, His Royal Highness had made it clear that Timothy Wimbledon, the brother of His Royal Highness, had conspired against the throne and in the end even killed his own father King Wimbledon III for it. Originally these

happenings between the royalty and aristocracy, hadn't mattered that much to him – Is there any difference for me if the King was to change?

But now that Duke Ryan wanted to grasp this opportunity to take His Highness's territory away, this, he now found totally unacceptable!

When he thought about it, just how had his life been before His Highness had come to Border Town? If he was remembering correctly, the former Lord was actually a Count who had rarely shown himself. The acquisition of the furs was done by his personal guards who often used their weapons to lower the prices. And when the Months of the Demons arrived they would all flee to live in the slums of Longsong Stronghold and end up suffering during that whole time.

But today, under His Highness' control the life in Border Town had become better and better, with changes being visible for everyone to see. Van'er thought, for example, when the miners had achieved a higher output they would also receive a higher payment. And even after His Highness put this black machine into the North Slope Mine, the additional output had still counted for the miner's work. Whether it was when building the walls, or mining gravel everyone was paid on time. During this whole winter, there wasn't even one person who had frozen or starved to death.

Of course, the biggest change was the implementation of the militia – no, now it's called the First Army.

Having them guarding the town, we commoners don't need to huddle together in these wooden sheds begging for others to give us food. If the Prince isn't here any longer, would the Duke still allow for the First Army to keep on existing?

Van'er took another deep breath and wiped his palms against his clothes. No, he certainly would not allow it. The nobles of the stronghold don't care for the lives of us commoners, it is exactly as His Highness had said before: Only an army composed of the commoners will be willing to fight for the lives of other commoners.

Van'er raised his head so that he could keep the left part of the sky inside his field of view, there in the distant he could see a small black dot circling around, when one was only taking a casual look, anyone would think it was actually just a large bird. But in truth, it was the artillery intelligence commander – Lightning, who was using the trees growing on both sides of the road as cover while constantly observing the enemy's movements. When she flew back, Van'er also noticed that as long as she did not take the initiative to fly over open areas, the people on the ground would only be able to see tree branches if they were to look upwards, so it was nearly impossible for them to detect that there was a witch that was flying over their heads.

After a quarter of an hour, Lightning flew closer to their frontal position while flashing a green ribbon.

This was signaling to them that the enemy had entered a range of 1000 meters and that they should prepare to start shooting. Van'er didn't know how far the distance His Highness called "1000

"meters" was, but when he saw the green signal, he just subconsciously followed the rules of the comprehensive exercise, giving the command to load the cannon and adjust the angle.

It didn't take the four groups of gunners a long time to complete their tasks, the canon angle was adjusted to the third setting while the gunpowder and the solid artillery shell were also inserted into the cannon's barrel.

He had thought that after he had stood on the wall and fought against the demonic beasts he could regard himself as an experienced fighter and also thought that he was talented, but today he came to discover that there was still a huge distance between himself, Iron Axe and Brian.

During the afternoon assembly, he'd had great problems trying to calm his heart. But these two men, when they led their groups to the appointed area, they not only looked as if there was nothing special about today, no, he could even hear from Brian's voice just how eager he was to fight. But he himself until now was unable to calm himself. With a bit of shame in his heart, he had to acknowledge that even the Rodney brothers seemed to be acting better than his own performance. This thought made Van'er feel very depressed.

He nervously licked his lips and checked Lightning's position once again.

But at this moment, the enemy's movement slowed down by a lot.

“What are they doing?” Rodney asked.

“That’s currently unknown,” Cat’s Paw answered. “For me, it seems like they are adjusting their formation? But they still look a little chaotic.”

“They are waiting for the other troops,” explained Jop with a slightly trembling voice, “It’s impossible for knights to fight alone, they always need a large number of people to follow them.”

“How do you know all this?” Nelson wasn’t convinced.

“I have already seen it! A knight will always take along at least two squires, while there will be another dozen serfs who have to handle their foraging,” he began to count it off on his fingers, “First, there is the Duke, as the Lord of Longsong Stronghold, he has at least a hundred knights, right? Then there is the light cavalry, who are at least three hundred people. Plus, the counts and viscounts who have their own territory... Many more! And don’t forget the mercenaries, they have all already tasted blood themselves, so they won’t even blink as they kill you! They will do anything for money! While we only have three hundred people.”

Actually, less than three hundred people, Van’er corrected in his mind. We only have two hundred and seventy soldiers armed with weapons, according to His Highness’s explanation it is because we lack in the area of production capacity. Now those who did not have guns of their own were sent to the artillery teams, they were to handle preparing the ammunition for the four cannons. When

Van'er discovered that they were a lot slower than his own group, he also felt a lot better.

"The mercenary, they're coming!" Jop cried out.

Van'er looked towards the enemy, there he could see a group with various kinds of armors taking the front in their battle formation, they did not ride, nor did they march in line, they just walked in small groups of twos or threes to the middle of the field. While the knights scattered to both sides, it seemed as they were giving up their position for the mercenaries. After a quarter of an hour, the Duke's allied forces were finally ready.

At this time, a knight came riding out of the enemy's camp into the direction of Border Town. Van'er became so nervous he almost gave the command to fire.

What should I do? Van'er looked once more at the sky, but he was still unable to discover Lightning, while the enemy was constantly coming closer while waving a white flag.

"He is the messenger sent by the Duke," Jop muttered, "He should be coming over, trying to persuade the Prince."

"It's none of our business," Rodney squatted down behind the canon and aligned his line of sight with the centerline of the barrel. "Leader, we need to adjust the canon, most of the knights have left the impact zone."

During their previous practice with live ammunition, they were repeatedly taught, that the canon attack range was represented by the centerline of the barrel, so if they wanted to hit their target, they had to make sure that the target overlapped with the barrel's centerline. So the five men began at the same time to turn around the canon until the canon once more pointed in the direction of the knights.

The messenger who had come in alone was then escorted by Carter to the back of their defense line, but Van'er knew that this move of the Duke was just a waste of time, the Prince would never agree to surrender.

Suddenly, Lighting abruptly flew in the direction of the defensive line, wildly waving a yellow flag in her hands.

The yellow signal meant that the opponent had entered the 8oom range, at this distance, they had the chance to hit the target with a solid projectile. It also meant, that as long as the gunner captain didn't prohibit firing, the gunner teams could fire at will.

His other team members also noticed the signal, so they all looked into his direction, and after he nodded once he took a deep breath then shouted, "Fire!"

Chapter 116 - War For Border Town (Part 2)

It was not the case that the knights could charge from the beginning at their fastest speed, after all, horses were limited by their physical endurance, so they were only able to maintain their fastest speed for a short period of time. At a thousand or eight hundred meters they would begin to gradually increase their speed until they reached five hundred meters away from their mark, only when they came within two hundred meters would they start galloping.

While in theory, the twelve-pound Napoleonic cannon had an effective range of up to 1,300 meters if it used solid shells. Maybe because it only had half the diameter than normal, Roland's cannon only had an effective range of a thousand meters. As a result, the furthest distance his artillery group were allowed to open fire at was at eight hundred meters. At this distance, reaching the target area could be guaranteed, while at the same time the cannon balls would also bounce forward after hitting the ground. Resulting in line damage, with a high chance to kill multiple targets with a single shot.

In order to let the mercenary attack first, Duke Ryan had ordered his knight to step to the side – letting them wait in an absolutely safe area, meaning an area where bows and crossbows were unable to reach the knights, but this distance was still close enough for an effective knight charge to be launched. Knowing of the low efficiency of the mercenaries, the knights were always ready to pull the horse's reins, waiting for any resistance in one place. However, like this, they became an almost fixed target, for the artillery group.

But the Duke certainly did not realise that by the time he ordered his troops to step aside , that they had already stepped onto Roland's prepared battlefield. While the middle of the road might have been flat and spacious, both of its sides were crammed with leaves and with other vegetation. What seemed from afar to be just ordinary grass, was in truth actually thick vines covered by a knee-deep layer of weeds, it was like a road plastered with natural tripwire. If the cavalry wanted to start a flanking assault on the defensive line, they would only be able to move forwards with a very slow degree of progress. The thousand-meter distance was clearly marked on the ground, it may not have been visible for the people on the ground, but to Lighting flying in the sky, it was clearly visible. The battlefield was precisely divided into several segments, and every differently colored mark represented a different distance – the enemy was now just a ruler moving about on a chess board, which permitted the artillery group to shoot without having to calculate the barrel's angle. They only had to go through the steps as they had implemented them during their training.

The cannon of Van'er's group was the first to roar with fury.

A large amount of gas generated by the detonation of the gunpowder pushed the projectile outwards, and at the moment it flew out of the muzzle, it had already reached a speed of more than four hundred meters per second, so after two seconds, the shell had already almost reached the knights. Directly flowing through the group of knights and boring itself into the ground beside the road. Splashing soil and gravel into every direction and creating panic amongst the horses, one knight reacted a little too late and fell from his horse.

The following next two shells also missed their target and only created a lot of dust.

But the last group was able to get a lucky hit – originally there was no one in its flight path, but a knight who was unable to gain back the control over his frightened horse happened to pass right into it. In front of this huge amount of kinetic energy, his armor existed in name only. The cannonball simultaneously pierced through the thin iron and human flesh, and after it bounced off the ground, it then hit another knight, cutting off his calf. Furthermore, it ended up penetrating through the horse's chest under the knight's hip and spreading its internal organs all over the ground.

If the Knight were in their normal phase of attack, the artillery group would need to adjust the angle of their shot, but the sudden blow had apparently shocked the whole coalition of the Duke's forces. They didn't know what had hit them, how could they – the shell was too fast to be seen with the human eye. So the knights didn't receive the command to attack, instead, they were still pacing back and forth in their original location, trying to appease their skittish mounts.

It was once more Van'er's group who was the fastest to complete the reloading process, starting the second round of shelling.

The new weapon exposed just how fragile and soft the human body really was, once hit by a passing iron ball, could cause injuries which were unable to ever be healed. But when the rider was directly hit by it, in addition to him losing several limbs, it would also splash blood everywhere. Only when they were hit by the

second round of artillery shells, were they finally able to make out a vaguely black shape, while it was taking the lives of their companions.

After the second round of shooting, the Duke was finally able to connect the fire and roaring sound in the enemy's camp with the indescribable strike against his unit. It seemed the other side had gotten its hands on an incredible weapon, with a range much farther than a crossbow, almost like one of the strongholds' trebuchets. Realizing this, the Duke immediately gave the order to sound the horns – thinking that as long as they were able to come into close range, these long-distance weapons would also become useless.

The knights, however, when hearing the horns, showed several kinds of reactions. Some of them really rushed into the direction of Border Town, but others were still fighting with their own horses, while a small part of the knights was retreating toward the rear of the battlefield. Together with the mercenaries swarming around, the whole scene quickly turned into chaos.

When the attacking knights returned to the road, the artillery group suddenly became frantic, in addition, to clean up the barrel and reloading its ammunition, they also had to adjust their cannon. At this time, Lighting flew once more in the direction of the defense line, holding a red ribbon in her hands.

The red signal meant that the enemy was approaching the five hundred meters line, at this distance, the artillery hit rate would reach more than eighty percent.

Van'er shouted: "The shooting angle is correct! Quick, light the fuse, light the fuse!"

When the deafening roar could be heard once more, he didn't even look to see if they had hit anything, instead, he immediately turned toward the ammunition distribution staff and shouted: "canister, send in the canister shelling!"

During the artillery training, His Royal Highness has repeatedly stressed the point, that when the red signal was hissed, even if the barrel was already loaded with solid shells, they should immediately shot and then reload with canister shells. In case that the barrel wasn't loaded, they should immediately fill it with canister shells, and then wait until the point where the enemy reached the three hundred mark.

The canister shells looked like a tin filled with thumb-sized balls and sawdust. To produce the canister shells, they first bore a hole into the tin, then they filled it with balls and sawdust, and then they stopped it with a thin piece of wood.

When Lighting finally showed the purple ribbon, the four artillery groups fired almost simultaneously.

This was also Van'er's first time using the canister shells – according to His Royal Highness, the wounds induced by canister shells were very difficult to heal, so they only practiced the loading procedure. So today it was also his first time seeing the amazing killing potential of these special shells.

Because of the huge pressure difference, the tin fractured into many pieces after it left the muzzle. The small iron balls inside of the tin fell like raindrops on the enemy, placing the knights three hundred meters away into the middle of a deadly metal storm, and turning the people and the horses into a bloody mist resembling the falling wheat as it was cut down. Some iron pellets after penetrating the knight's bodies still had so much kinetic energy left that even the knights standing behind them weren't able to escape either.

The knights lucky enough to survive the storm finally entered into sprinting distance, while only having one thought in their mind – that was to break through this thin line of defense, and massacre those cowards who were only able to hide behind those cruel weapons. Only a short amount of time was needed to cover the last hundred and fifty meters, the knights were already lowering their bodies, pushing the horses to reach their highest speed.

However, this seemingly short distance of one hundred and fifty meters, turned into an uncrossable distance, the last round of firing of canister shells completely destroyed the last bit of their fighting will. In the range of one hundred meters, the solid iron balls were able to penetrate through as many as two to three people, turning the area in front of the cannon fire into a field of death. From the twenty knights riding at the forefront, almost none had been able to survive, the only difference between them lied in the amount of iron balls by which they had been hit.

The knight's assault had completely collapsed.

Because the fear created by the collapse of the knight's assault was so huge, the knights following attempted to turn around their horses wanting to flee the battlefield.

When they saw the knights scatter the mercenaries weren't willing to take another step forward. They had always only been working for the money, but they immediately turned around when they saw how much they would have to pay. Now, at the moment of their retreat, they ran even much faster than they had during their attack.

When the wave of their crushing defeat swept over the dukedom's allied forces, the situation soon became impossible to control. The crowd had only one thought left, they had to flee. There were people who fell and were trampled to death, no one took the time to care for others, they only hated themselves for not being able to grow another pair of legs.

At this moment the melody of the Guerrilla warfare song resounded through the battlefield, and the lines of the infantry began to march in step, sweeping across the battlefield.

Chapter 117 - Chase (Part 1)

It was Carter's first time seeing a battle.

A lineup of more than three hundred knights was unable to even scratch the edge of their defensive line, instead, they had been totally crushed.

Until the end, they had failed to even enter into a range of fifty meters – it was the hunter team's fire line, only when the enemy had come closer than fifty meters were they allowed to open fire.

The four cannons had brought the enemy's assault to a complete halt at merely one hundred meters. Along the range of one hundred and fifty to one hundred meters, laid an orderly row of twenty bodies, it was as if they had run into a wall. And these men, like himself, belonged to the strongest category of fighters, Knights; otherwise, they would have never been able to control their horses under the sound of gunfire.

In the end, Carter was glad that he wasn't one of them. He felt a faint hunch that the battles in the future would become very different, and it was only a matter of time, until Roland Wimbledon, the master of such a powerful force would aspire to the throne and aim for kingship.

When the members of the First Army saw the bloody battlefield, they became dizzy and began vomiting or had other adverse reactions. But this wasn't the reaction they would show if they had personally killed the enemy during close combat, the sense of

deterrence brought on by killing someone over a long distance was much less when compared with killing someone with a knife, their reaction couldn't be counted as critical. Carter picked a set of people from his own team to pick up the severed limbs and put them back with the dead bodies, while still searching for the living people.

The sun gradually fell behind the mountains, and when Carter looked at the blood-red sky, and the distant woods with its crying crows, he was suddenly hit by a dull and dreary feeling.

The era of the Knights was over.

...

Even until now Duke Ryan was still unable to recover.

He couldn't understand how it was possible that he had lost, even more to a line of defense as thin as a slice of onion skin, normally it would have been enough to poke it with just a finger to run through it, but today, it was his knights who fled like they had come face to face with the Devil. In truth, he couldn't even blame them because the assault was under the command of his elite knights.

His personal guards even had to chop down several people so that the blindly fleeing mercenary didn't come close to the Duke's position. But he was unable to do anything else, no matter how much he shouted, he couldn't unite the defeated men once more. In desperation, even Duke Ryan had to retreat with the flow of

fleeing people, and their mindless escape only stopped after they had crossed nearly ten miles.

When the night came, the Duke chose a place close to the river bank to camp. Even after setting up torches to lead the separated knights and mercenaries back to their camp, most of their people were still missing. To make matters worse, the freedman had without any hesitation left in the carts with the food, so tonight they had to slaughter a few horses to serve as rations.

The five nobles huddled together, within the camp's largest tent, looking with a fearful expression towards Duke Ryan, however even he wasn't in any better constitution.

"Who can tell me, what kind of new weapon it was that they had used? They are far better than crossbows, and they don't seem to be throwing the stones like with a catapult," the Duke began to speak, while glancing at Rene, "You also stood at the forefront, tell me what did you see?"

"My Lord, I... couldn't see anything clearly," Rene answered, "I only know that every time this roar could was heard, our men would fall in batches, especially when it sounded for the last time, it seemed like the rushing knights had been hit by an invisible wall. Furthermore I also saw how their heads and arms were split from their bodies, it was just as if ..." he thought for a moment, "we were like an egg dropped from the height of a city wall."

"Was it the power of a witch?" Count earl whispered frightened.

“No,” answered the Duke, “My knights were wearing a God’s Stone of Retaliation, so the power of a witch couldn’t have hurt them! We weren’t attacked by witches, in front of those stones, they are nothing more than an ordinary woman.

“Oh, that’s right, sir,” Rene suddenly spoke up, as though he was remembering something. “Before I heard the loud bang, I saw how carts which stood in a row, they had a huge iron pipe, it emitted a red light and a cloud of smoke.”

“An Iron pipe? What red light and what smoke? Doesn’t that sound like the ceremony barrel?” Count Elk asked with much doubt in his voice.

The Duke, of course, knew what a ceremony barrel was. Previously they were only used by the King at the beginning of major celebrations, but today nearly every Lord would use them. Even he had two ceremony barrels made out of bronze in his castle, they were used to light up snow powder. But that sound when compared with today’s breathtaking thunderous noise, couldn’t be further apart.

“The ceremony barrels would never be able to kill knights,” Count Honeysuckle said. “No matter what the Prince used, it was powerful enough to defeat us all. So what should we do next?”

Hearing this, Duke Ryan glared in his direction, the sound of the word “defeat” was especially ear-piercing. “We haven’t lost,” he insisted. “A battle alone doesn’t decide a war. We only have to reach the stronghold, there I can put another force together, while at the same time I will also cut off trade from the Redwater River.”

Without any food supplement, Border Town wouldn't be able to survive for another month, and as soon as he dared to bring those villagers out, my knight will rush at them from all sides and in the end, defeat him.

Eventually, the victory would become his, just as had he wanted, but the loss he had already suffered couldn't be made up with just such a small town... his dream of taking over the North turned out to be only a bubble. Damn! If I will ever catch that Roland Wimbledon, I will have to make sure to cut him into a million pieces!

"But my Lord, the fleets crossing over the Redwater River aren't only coming from us, there are also ships from Willow Town, Fallen Dragon Ridge and Redwater City. If we cut everything off, wouldn't..." Count Honeysuckle clearly wasn't convinced.

"I will buy everything; it doesn't matter to whom they sell. As long as they receive their money they will be satisfied," said the Duke with a frosty voice, "Now everyone should head back to their own tent's and go to sleep, tomorrow morning we have to rise early and ride further down the road with the knights. Everyone who doesn't have a horse will stay behind to lead the mercenaries.

No one is able to march during the night, even if the 4th Prince intends to pursue us. He can only start at dawn, the first enemy he will encounter will be the mercenaries, he thought, even if that group of trash collapsed on the first encounter, I still have many people left who will fight for me.

During the whole of next day, the Duke didn't receive any news of the 4th Prince having caught up. In order to confirm the news, he sent his trusted aides to expand the search range, but they all returned with the same news. This finally let him feel a little relieved, most probably this new weapon has the same problem as our trebuchets, they are too heavy to be transported and can only be used in defense. Relying on only his bunch of miners with their sticks, he doesn't dare to act so reckless.

By three o'clock in the afternoon, the Duke had ordered his knights to stop for the day, waiting for the people behind him to catch up. Close to dusk, the mercenaries and freedmen were finally able to catch up with his remaining 66 knights. And they then all became busy setting up a circle of hastily erected tents.

He only had to survive for the night, tomorrow he could rush and reach Longsong Stronghold – then he would finally be safely behind his 30 feet high limestone walls, his hundreds of guards and the naturally formed moat. Even if the other side could use their new long-range weapon, he could just use the trebuchets placed behind the wall to counterattack. Against all this, the Prince couldn't win.

But all day long the Duke had a constant feeling of discomfort, he constantly had the feeling that someone was staring at him from afar.

Most probably it is just an illusion, he thought, I'm might just be a little too nervous.

The next morning, the Duke was awoken by the sound of gunfire.

When he rushed out of his tent, he could see people everywhere who had covered their heads and were trying to sneak away like rats. Yet, from time to time he could still see a fountain of blood or sail splash into the sky. When he looked to the West, he could see the enemy lined up in their strange uniform, quietly standing outside his camp. At the moment there was only one thought in the Duke's head – how had they caught up to us?

How come they weren't detected by the knights that I've sent out yesterday?!

"My Lord, you have to flee!" shouted a personal guard who was leading another horse at his side.

This awoke Osman Ryan from his blanked state of mind, he immediately jumped on the back of the horse and followed his guard to the East. However, not long after they had left the camp, they saw another line-up of this strange force.

Wearing the same kind of leather uniform, holding the same strange short stick in their hands and also standing in two neat rows, even their facial expression was nearly the same.

Then the Duke once more heard that cheerful tune with its extremely rich rhythm, at the same time the Prince troops began to march at a neat pace, directly towards his direction.

Chapter 118 - Chase (Part 2)

Even though Roland had let the First Army train for two times a day, he had never let them march during the night.

It was dangerous for an army to march during the night, they wouldn't be able to see the road, there was also the chance that they could get attacked by wild animals or snakes, it was easy to get lost and if they used a torch they would become a natural target. So he had to wait until dawn the next day before he could let his army march, trailing the Duke's forces.

In order to ensure the smooth succession of operations, the Prince decided to follow the First Army on the battlefield. Of course, compared with riding on a bumpy road and getting a sore bottom, he chose to rather take a ride on Little Town.

After half a month of training Hummingbird was now able to lighten and transport a twelve-pound cannon for a fixed distance. Roland also took into account that the heavier the object the longer was the enchanting longer the process would take so he arranged for her to begin with the transformation at dawn. He also had to take into consideration that the first cannon had to be enchanted for the longest, and the remaining cannons would be enchanted in a descending duration order to ensure that the four cannons would lose their enchanting as close together as possible.

Thanks to Hummingbird's ability, Little Town was now capable of carrying four cannons in one go as well as the corresponding members of their artillery teams. The huge cement boat was now full of people – in addition to the artillery team and Roland, there

were also Anna, Nightingale, Nana, Leaves, Echo, Hummingbird and Lord Pine on the boat. Lastly, there was also Wendy, she was responsible for providing the power and Brian acted as steering man.

It could be said, that with the exception of Scroll, Soraya, Lily and Mystery Moon, who were all witches who couldn't fight, almost the whole nest had come out. Originally it hadn't been necessary for Anna to join them on the battlefield, but under the firm will shown in her eyes, Roland couldn't find it in his heart to let her stay behind in Border Town.

Six troops of the First Army's gunner team were under the leadership of Carter and Iron Axe following the marks created by Lightning, who alone was responsible for keeping track of the enemy. This group of people was quietly marching behind the enemy, always keeping exactly outside of the scope of the enemy's scouts. At the moment Lightning became aware of the enemy's scouting activities, the army would immediately stop its forward motion. Along their road they were also able to capture a lot of scattered mercenaries and freedmen, but at the moment they weren't able to deal with the surrender of the enemy. So they had no other choice than to disarm them, so now there were other guards who didn't belong to the gunner team following together with them on the road.

This was Roland's first time to guiding his "Army" on mission of conquest, he was standing on Little Town's bow and feeling the morning breeze, while at the same moment also feeling enormously proud of his own success.

“What are you laughing at?” Anna suddenly appeared by his side, and was directly looking into his eyes she asked.

“Uhh...” Roland quickly put his smile away, “Nothing.”

“Really?” She took out a handkerchief and gave it to him, “You have saliva on your face.”

“...” Roland had the sudden impulse to jump into the water, “Thank you.”

When Lighting reported about the enemy’s camp, the sun was already set. According to the information she gathered during her investigations, the enemy apparently showed the signs of walking away from a heavy defeat which resulted in the drop of their moral to the freezing point. When they set up their camp at dusk and sent their knights to scout, they couldn’t wait to end their investigation and return to the camp, out of fear of not finding their way back in the dark.

Roland’s troops were stationed on the shore, two kilometers away from the Duke’s army.

All along the road, they didn’t meet with any enemies, so the plan to wipe out the enemy was already half way successful.

Now he only had to wait until the first light of the next day, and then while the enemy was still in the preparation phase their siege could begin.

This was Roland's first time he was spending the night in the wild, and he was more inclined to sleep on Little Town than to meet all the reptiles which would run through the camp. The cannons parked on the ship and the inventory in the shed had already been emptied out and brought into the camp so that Little Town could become the temporary residence of the Prince. In addition to Roland, the other witches also stayed on board for overnight. The floor was covered by mattresses, and everyone was lying down shoulder to shoulder.

Roland wanted to show modesty, but in the end, the witches were much less concerned about this matter than he was. With the exception of Anna, they had all faced a lot of hardship during their life, fleeing from place to place, so sleeping in the wild had become common for them. Soon, everyone was able to fall asleep, only Roland and Anna had difficulties sleeping. The former was so used to a soft bed, that he had some difficulties adapting to the deck's hard surface, while the latter didn't know what she should think, she ended up just turning to the side and watching Roland. However, when the Prince turned his head, Anna would always quickly close her eyes, pretending to be asleep, but in the moonlight, Roland could still see her eyelashes slightly jitter. If he wasn't afraid that the others would wake up from the noise, Roland would really want to pinch the tip of Anna's small nose, forcing her to open her eyes and then afterward hold her in his arms.

In this manner, they both ended up being unable to sleep for very long.

When the sky was still not light up, Roland began his plan to

encircle the enemy's camp: He divided his army of two hundred and seventy into two teams, each group of them would be supported by two cannons. One of them was sent to the rear of the Duke's camp, around one kilometer down the Duke's path. Lightning was still responsible for monitoring the Duke's movements, but in addition to this, when the cannons were set in position, the little girl also had the instruction to inform Roland. The moment he received the signal, he would send Carter out together with the rest of the First Army to start storming the Duke's camp.

To prevent the cement ship from drifting away from the correct route, Nightingale would step into her fog. After all, her black and white vision could also be used as night vision, so with her instructions, Brian was able to maneuver the ship as if it was the still the middle of the day.

This process had been repeatedly practiced, and now everyone was able to do their part even with closed eyes. Wendy was once more in charge of the powering the sails, under her effort it was almost as if Little Town had become highly ambitious. In merely one hour all the troops had been placed into their positions and Iron Axe had taken over command of the interception team. Seeing this, Lightning flew above Carter's team, and showed them an orange flag.

At this point, the first lights of a new day could be seen.

And now the plan of encirclement and annihilation had finally stepped into its final part.

Since Carter's team was only responsible for protecting the two cannons they didn't need to move forward, so Echo was assigned to work under Iron Axe's command. When Carter's team reached the camp they quickly moved the cannons into position and directed them towards the enemy's camp – at this moment most of the enemies were still sleeping.

With the typical roaring sound of the cannons, solid's shells crashed into the enemy's camp. This woke the knights and mercenaries who came rushing out from their tents, but they were already awaited by Carter's team, who were all quietly standing there in formation. With their former day's experience of defeat, no one even dared to challenge this seemingly thin line of defense, they only flocked together and tried to flee towards the East.

Directly into the arms of the already waiting Iron Axe.

When the enemy appeared his field of vision, the final stage for the moment of the Duke's annihilation had been set in motion.

Echo began to play her music, and under the sound of her drums, the two neatly arranged lines started their move forward to the enemy – in order to put some pressure on the Duke, Iron Axe had to take the initiative to attack and intercept the Duke. If they just stuck to their former place, the enemy would likely spur their horses and bypass them then escape into the woods.

Duke Ryan had fallen into despair, he was unable to understand how the others were able to catch up and even overtake them.

Should I just confess my failure and surrender? He wondered what Roland Wimbledon would do to a Duke who dared to draw his sword and attack a member of the royal family. Would he imprison him, would he send him into exile, but more than likely he would just send him directly to the guillotine. No matter what, the future of Longsong Stronghold would certainly have nothing to do with him.

Seeing how the enemy had came closer step by step, as well as how from time to time the roaring sound and red fire of this fearful weapon would once more spread terror within his men, he knew if he didn't flee at this moment, he would never again have the possibility to escape. He only had thirty people left, so this really was his last chance.

"They cannot stop us," the Duke shouted, "as long as we cross the road, they won't be able to catch up with us, after all, they only have two legs, furthermore we are only half a day away from the stronghold!"

The Duke then began to push his mount forward, unfortunately, not everyone had such a desperate spirit as himself. In the end, except for his personal guards, only some other people followed his assault.

The Music stopped.

The other side stopped at exactly the same time, as well as standing in a neat line like a wall.

He then saw how the other side began to rise their strange sticks.

When there was only around one hundred steps remained between the Duke and the human wall, he could hear one banging sound following after another. He then felt a piercing pain in his chest and abdomen, giving him the feeling like he was hit by a warhammer. Then came paralysis and the feeling of helplessness. His body began to fall backward, finally falling down from his horse.

While falling, the Duke opened his mouth trying to say something, but no clear sound came out, he was only able to cough twice, then a strong sweetly smell entered his nose, and his throat was blocked by a sticky liquid. Then darkness began to surround him.

Chapter 119 - Ransom (Part 1)

Petrov Hull sat in front of his desk subconsciously, he was playing with a piece of parchment he held in his hands – it was the weekly delivery of the theater's afternoon program. If this were peaceful times, he would have chosen a good drama and let his housekeeper pay the deposit, afterwards sending an invitation to Aurelia.

But he was unable to read even one word that was on the parchment.

Today was the seventh day of the expedition, if everything had gone smoothly, his father should have already come back yesterday alongside the retinue of the Duke. Perhaps they were delayed during their journey, perhaps the horses had gotten tired and they'd had to rest, or they might have taken an extra rest day in Border Town, right? He tried to comfort himself, but the feeling of uneasiness in his heart was slowly growing.

The 4th Prince Roland Wimbledon had left a deep impression on him, Petrov couldn't understand why such an outstanding prince, would have received such a terrible assessment by the King. Bad character, dandyism, incompetence, ignorance and without having any learning or skills... any of these evaluations didn't fit the Prince that he knew.

Because of this, his anxiety only became stronger.

He feared that the Duke would lose against the Prince.

“Master Petrov,” his housekeeper shouted, “there is a letter that has just arrived from the stronghold.”

A letter from the stronghold?

“Bring it to me,” Petrov ordered.

Even before he had opened the cover, he was already stunned by the identity of the sender.

This letter had been written by the 4th Prince!

“Duke Osman Ryan used military forces to attack a territory under the King’s rule, trying in vain to start a rebellion. Furthermore, the Duke was already executed on the battlefield, and now the Longsong Stronghold is once more under the rule of the Kingdom.”

Had the duke lost? His heart sank when he began to read further.

“With exception of the die-hard members of the Duke’s guard, the most of the others had pleaded guilty. Normally treason against the royal family would be punished by death, but because of the His Highness’ kindness, only the leader was put to death for his evil crimes, however the others still cannot be pardoned. So the rest of the rebels will be handled in accordance with the war customs and will be held until their freedom can be bought. The Longsong Stronghold’s castle will be used as exchange point, the

following people on this list's freedom can be bought."

The document was extremely awkward phrased. It was not written with the diplomatic turn of phrase, but it was still able to express its meaning clearly – the Duke's rebellion had failed, and if they wanted to free the prisoner they would have to offer money in exchange.

When Petrov's read the names on the following list, he saw that his father's name was impressively written in the first line.

"Hedee!" He shouted the housekeeper's name, "Prepare the carriage, I'm going to strongholds' castle!"

...

The territory of Count Honeysuckle laid to the east of the stronghold, so when Paul arrived at the castle area, it was already half an hour later. The Lord's castle was full of the members of the "militia" who he had never seen before – they weren't wearing any shiny armor, neither were they wearing any cloaks or bands, instead they held a strange baton in their hands, with a kind of spear on the top. They just stood there in two neat and tidy rows, with their heads high and their chests out, simply expressing their power in their imposing manner.

After he identified himself, Petrov was allowed access to the gardens and he was then lead by a guard towards the castle's Grand Hall.

This was a place he had already visited many times before, but when he entered it today, it was like he was entering a completely new territory. All the guards standing in the corridors were ones he had never seen before, no one smiled at him after he greeted them, they just stared back blankly. He was stopped by a knight before the entry door of the hall.

“State your name.”

“Petrov Hull,” Petrov answered slightly unhappily, he didn’t like the other one’s interrogatory tone, and so he emphasized, “For you, it’s Lord Hull.”

“I see,” it seemed like his counterpart didn’t accept that statement as being the truth, instead he just looked at the parchment in his hand, “Shalafi Hull, Count Honeysuckle is your...”

“Father.”

“I’m Carter Lannis, The Chief Knight of the 4th Prince. Please come with me to the side room first, we need to check if you have any weapons hidden on your body.”

After a thorough search, only Petrov’s God’s Stone of Retaliation was taken away by the guards.

“That’s not a weapon,” Petrov reminded.

“Of course not,” the knight nodded. “We will return it to you after the meeting.

He opened his mouth, but in the end, he didn’t say another word. They really will give me the stone back? His God’s Stone of Retaliation was one of the strongest kinds, with a worth of at least fifty gold royals, so he couldn’t believe that the other side wouldn’t replace it with a defective stone. That isn’t important, he thought, I will just take it as part of the ransom.

When he finally entered the hall, he saw the 4th Prince sitting on the throne writing something down. When the prince raised his head, he had a startled expression on his face, but then he laughed, “We met once again, Mr. Ambassador.”

It was still the familiar face and tone, letting Petrov feel a little more relaxed, so he gave him a bowing salute, “I present my regards to you, Your Royal Highness.”

“Sit down,” said Roland, raising his hand to offer him his seat, “In all likelihood, you want to know what happened. I can tell you that your father was not hurt, he was the first to surrender.”

“Thank you for your kindness, Your Highness,” Petrov said quickly. “I do not know how much ransom Your Highness will want, as long as my father can be let out, I will immediately send all of our money to you.”

“I do not need money,” Roland shook his finger. “I want livestock and people.”

It was normal to want livestock, and even fifty years ago, when the conflict between the Lords had ended, most of the time the loser had to pay for cattle and sheep, stories like this was something he had often times read in books. But... People, what would that mean? "Your Royal Highness, cattle, sheep, horses, of those the Honeysuckle territory has a lot of, as for people..."

"Very simple, I'm in need of bricklayers, masons, carpenters, farmers, serfs and so on," the Prince handed him a scroll, "You can pay us according to the numerical conversion above, as long as you can reach the total number of three thousand it will be enough." He smiled, conveniently, it was this Count from whom he had caught the most knights, so he also had to pay the highest ransom."

Petrov spread the scroll at the table.

Written on it were the names of all kinds of domesticated animals and the profession of people, followed by a number, such as: cattle 3, sheep 2, mason 10 and the like, he immediately understood the meaning of all this.

A value of three thousand was the same as a herd of one thousand cattle or 300 masons were only enough to redeem his father. Of course, his territory wasn't able to provide so many cattle and masons. But with this paper, he had so many possible combinations of items, so many choices. As a noble who had to work daily with trade, Petrov instantly realized, how much finesse had been put into this list. Just a few days would be enough to calculate the optimal solution for the minimum costs for his

territory which would still meet the requirements of three thousand points.

“Your Royal Highness, I can...”

“One day, you only have one day,” Roland stretched out his index finger, “This only means that you have to make your choice in one day, after all, you can’t gather so many people and animals in three to four days. But I can’t always stay here, at most I will stay here for a week, then I will leave.”

“One day it is...” Petrov suddenly got so shocked that he stared at Roland with large eyes , “Wait, you just said... that you want to leave?” What does this mean? If the Prince didn’t lie in the letter, then the Duke has already died on the battlefield. With this Longsong Stronghold now belonged to His Highness. But now he was actually saying that he wanted to leave, why would he want to return to that small and broken down Border Town? No, that was beside the point! The key point was that if His Royal Highness went away, who would manage this magnificent city? His mind became a stormy sea, would one of the Duke’s children inherit the throne? When he thought through everything that he knew, this didn’t seem to be a possibility, after all, it would only be a question of time until they build up a new force to avenge their father? In addition to the Ryan family and the other five noble families, were there any others who could take over?

“Yes,” Roland nodded. “I’ll take the ransom and then I will return to Border Town.”

Petrov’s mind was suddenly filled with an outrageous idea, and

the moment he had thought of it, he was unable to suppress it.

“Your Royal Highness,” Petrov began, then he had to swallow and was only able to whisper. “Excuse me, is there also a numerical value which can ‘redeem’ Longsong Stronghold?”

Chapter 120 - Ransom (Part 2)

Hearing this question, Roland looked at Petrov in interest, and then laughingly said: "You're the first person to ask me that." He then took his cup and drank from it, afterward stated explaining in a casual tone, "There is no doubt that Longsong Stronghold belongs to me. It's still mine, even while I'm not here. But, I do need a man, or a family, to supervise the stronghold for me, so you should not be asking for a ransom, but rather for a 'Representative's Fee.'"

Representative... Petrov was no stranger to this word, as a sharp-eyed businessmen they would always fix their aim on increasing the output of their territory, but all the peddling nobles didn't really have the time or would express disdain for this sort of work, so in the end they could look for others to sell their goods to. In order to obtain that right, the merchants had to pay a sum in advance, as a deposit.

"How many gold royals would you want?" After asking, he took a deep breath to trying to calm himself down.

"This would be a long-time deal, so it wouldn't be over with just one payment," Roland paused, "Every Month you have to pay 30% of the stronghold's tax revenue, as well as a material worth of 1000 points, everything else would be for yourself."

That doesn't sound excessive, Petrov thought, as long as I could get complete control over Longsong Stronghold, so it seems that even the Prince can be fair. But first I have to confirm that the Prince isn't actually joking, that he really is willing to go through

with this.

This would really be a golden opportunity; Petrov was completely hooked. I and the Prince aren't mortal enemies, since the Duke has completely failed, his children will also be deprived of their right of inheritance. Even the coalition of six noble families can't defeat the Prince, who can prevent him from taking over the Western territories? To join the stronger side is one of the basic principles of the continuation of one own nobility, if I can gain the approval of His Highness before the other four families even know of it, House Honeysuckle will become the strongest family within the Western territories.

"Your Royal Highness, why don't you want to stay in Longsong Stronghold? The castle has so much more to offer than Border Town does."

"What you really want to ask is, why I don't want to manage Longsong Stronghold myself, right?" Roland looked slightly embarrassed, "There are many reasons, for example, the power structure would get so entangling that I would have to spend too much time and effort trying to straighten out the relationships between each of them. Furthermore, don't forget the profit, as a local nobleman, I think you or the others would know better than I do how to really govern this territory, so this would become a win-win deal. Besides, there's plenty of other reasons, you may start thinking about it when you go back." The prince played with the silver cup in his hands, "Oh that's right, in the case that I would select you as a representative, I also won't have to fear that you will come to build a force trying revenge the Duke, right? "

“Of course not, Your Royal Highness!” although the last question came a little unexpected, Petrov was still able to answer it immediately.

Since the Duke is gone, the first thought in the other five nobles' minds will be how they can come to take over his territory, regarding matters such as revenge, who cares?

But Petrov also knew the reasons the Prince had given him weren't his actual reasons. ‘The power structure would be too complex’, ‘it would be difficult to straighten them out’? In face of his overwhelming force, he could just use his power to destroy any idea of building a resistance. But even so, in just one or two years, all the other nobles will already have forgotten the loser's name, the same will happen to Duke Ryan. But during this period of two years, it's absolutely impossible to transform Border Town into such a big city like Longsong Stronghold.

His Royal Highness must have a deeper intention.

“That's good to hear, then the city...”

“I am willing to act as your representative, Your Highness,” blurted Petrov out, but not much later his expression became hesitant once again, “But, King – no, I mean your brother does not necessarily agree with this result. In case he assigns a new Duke to this territory, I won't be able to fight against the King.

“There is no need for you to fear a confrontation,” Roland said and threw two letters in front of him. “Look at this, this

documents I'd found in the former Duke Ryan's study."

When Petrov quickly swept his gaze over the content of the letters, he couldn't help to gasp in shock.

The first letter looked like was sent to the Duke by a spy, it seems like the new King and the Queen of Clearwater have fought a big battle in and close to Eagle City, and the result ended up as a major loss for the King? The second letter was even more horrifying, even so, it was only half written, it was still clear that Duke Ryan wanted to annex the North. The idea of becoming independent was clearly revealed. The letter wasn't finished and it was furthermore unknown to whom he wanted to send it.

But Petrov still understood immediately what His Highness wanted to tell him – there was no need for him to resist because the new King had already enough problems on his own. Otherwise, the Duke would have never dared to declare his independence. With his elite knights, he was already invincible in the Western territory, the only difference to the King's Knights laid in their numbers.

The secret letter could have been forged, but the second parchment was indeed written with Osman Ryan's handwriting, so unless the prince found a witch that could mimic the writing of others... For a short moment, he thought about this possibility only to immediately dismiss this speculation again.

The Prince had no reason to try to deceive him, implementing someone as his representative wasn't one-sided, if his representative was unable to rule over the stronghold, the Prince

would also not profit from the deal. Moreover, every Duke assigned by King Timothy would become an enemy of the Prince.

If he wanted for House Honeysuckle to stay above the other four noble families, he had to rely on the support of the Prince, and on the other hand, in order to ensure that everything was handled in his interest, the Prince would also have to make sure that the Hull Family wouldn't get challenged.

When he had thought everything through, Petrov slowly stood up and bowed towards Roland, “The Hull family is willing to serve you.”

“Well,” the latter nodded, “but it’s not up to you to decide, I’ll have to ask you some questions first.”

“Your Highness, please.”

“What are you going to do with those who are against you?”

“How much do you estimate the monthly tax revenue will be? Also, how would you guarantee that you can pay a thousand points each month?”

“In the case that I request you to vigorously expand the trade and commerce sector, what would you do?

“...”

Petrov had thought that His Highness would take this opportunity to gather as much information about the other Lords of the Western territory, he had never expected that the other side would ask such weird questions, in the end, this were almost all only questions about his policy, means, and his general business knowledge.

After he having all of these questions asked of him, Petrov put his mind into answering them one after another, along with his answers, His Highness' expression also became more and more satisfied. Finally, the Prince clapped his hands and said, "Well, that will be enough for today. When you have calculated how to redeem the value of 3000 points, you can come back and free your father, rest assured, during these days I will properly entertain him.

"Your Highness, that representative..."

"Will be announced another day." Roland gave one of his knights the signal to see him out.

When Petrov left the hall, he had much to think about, he got his God's Stone of Retaliation back from Carter – it was still the same brightly shining blue stone, it seems the value of fifty gold royals wasn't much.

"What can you tell me?" Roland turned his view to Nightingale who stand beside him.

“Oh, basically everything he said was the truth,” she shrugged, “he was much more sincere than the several Ladies and Gentlemen you have previously talked to. That said, is it right to tell everyone the same story? Furthermore, showing them those letters, all of them are confidential.

“Not to everyone,” the Prince looked down at the list in his hands, “They were all from the five noble families, only those big nobles are suitable to manage Longsong Stronghold in my stead. If their power is not strong enough, even if I was to give them this position, they wouldn’t be able to run this stronghold, in the end, there would only be a lot of infighting. As for the news that Timothy Wimbledon was defeated by Eagle City, that’s not really a secret so to say. Sooner or later the news would spread through the whole Kingdom of Graycastle, for me it’s even better that it spreads a little faster.

But the content of this news was just perfect for me, he thought, if the 2nd Prince wasn’t defeated, I’m afraid that I would have to spend a lot of time to hold him back – and even if he tried to use force, the results may not have been so beautiful.

“So... will you choose him?”

“If nothing else happens,” Roland said with a smile, “he was the first one who took the initiative to ask by himself, the subjective initiative has always been the most important quality of the employees. Furthermore, I would have never expected that there would be someone within the five families who is so well versed in the field of administration and trade. I have thought that they

would only know how to ride and kill."

When he found the name of Petrov Hull on the list, he gently scratched a circle around him.

Chapter 121 - Looting

When he had talked to all of the five noble families, Roland felt slightly relieved.

When he leaned back into the chair, Nightingale took the initiative to step behind him, putting both her hands on his shoulders and began to massage them.

From the moment of defeating the Duke, up until he had taken over the Lord's Castle, had needed merely one day.

Things were going much smoother than he had initially thought, the moment after the Duke had died, most of the people had chosen to surrender. For mercenaries, it was more usual to change their sides during the war, so they just kneeled on the ground, saying that they were willing to fight for the prince.

So the mercenaries became responsible for guarding over the surrendered knights and nobles, while the First Army was responsible for guarding the mercenaries. Like this, the big group moved further towards to the east, and in the afternoon at 3 p.m. they finally arrived at Longsong Stronghold. When the guards saw the head of the dead Duke and the other captured nobles, they had immediately opened the gate, letting the 4th Prince into the city.

Roland didn't wait until all the nobles were gathered, giving them the chance to welcome him with great fanfare and to declare him as new City Lord, instead he immediately left for the Lord's Castle.

The castle was placed in the middle of the city and looked like a city within the city. When he entered the castle area a small skirmish broke out, Nightingale had to use an explosion sachet to blow open the entrance to the flower garden. Within the garden, more than twenty guards loyal to the old Duke tried to stop Roland from stepping in, but they all were quickly killed by the First Army. However the guards had still been able to use their hand crossbows, resulting in five injuries of which two had been seriously injured, fortunately Nana had come along with the military operation and had quickly been able to heal them.

In the meantime, ten personal guards used this opportunity to take the rest of the Duke's family to flee through the backdoor, but they were still spotted by Lightning and were captured soon afterwards. The Duke's wife and her two sons hands were tied and were waiting to be judged – even now they were still in the dark, ignorant of the fact that the Duke had been defeated.

When Roland gained control over the Lord's Castle, Border Town's First Army immediately swarmed out and took over the castle district. When comparing the Lord's Castle in Longsong Stronghold with the castle in Border Town, Roland had to admit that the stronghold's castle had a much more magnificent shape. It had a hexagonal outline with six watchtowers on its wall, and a five-story high tower in the middle – during this era it was really rare to build places that were this high. Within the castle grounds, there were also the residences of the castle's inhabitants, warehouses, stables and everything else they needed, the Duke even had his own personal prison under the castle's basement.

He put the valuable prisoners like the Duke's family into this

exact prison, the civilians were all freed, while the mercenaries had their weapons confiscated and placed into the castle garden or it's free rooms. At the same time he also picked out some leaders and paid them to keep watch themselves – in Roland's eyes, the Northern Slope Mine would be the best destination for these opportunistic people, but at the moment he still had more important things he had to do.

Until now, he had still to do the most important task after a battle – which was commonly known as looting the corpse.

Roland together with a witch kept looking over everything over and over again inside of the castle, he hadn't even let go of the God's Stone of Retaliation he had found in the vault. After they had searched through everything, the gain was really impressive. Just within two boxes they had discovered in the basement, he found already more than 10.000 gold royals alone. Within a hidden chamber in the bedroom Nightingale discovered several scores of eyeball sized gems. Echo found another chamber hidden behind the fireplace, which wasn't only filled with a variety of gold crafts, such as the scepter, the crown, etc., there were also many pieces of dazzling jewelry, neatly hung on the wall on a wooden frame.

This were all the Duke's personal financial resources!

When Roland saw all this great wealth in front of him and compared it with the five hundred gold royals he had gathered in the last two season, his heart was filled with myriads of regrets. He wasn't prepared for how alluring the feeling of looting was, if he didn't come from a highly developed industrial era, he most probably would have kept everything for himself.

But now he could only sigh with sorrow, he had to think of the greater picture. In the foreseeable future, the working population in the Border Town would increase substantially, and before he could develop his territorial agriculture, he would need to import large amounts of grain from other sources.

So all the treasure was stored into boxes and were lightened by Hummingbird, then under the protection of Iron Axe and several personal guards, they were brought back to his own castle storage in Border Town. With the time included to enchant everything, the delivery would take around three days.

Because of this, after the second day Roland no longer took in gold royals as ransom. Eating the Duke had brought him many benefits, and now he only needed more living people and animals.

“Your Highness, do you really only want to stay here for a week?” Asked Nightingale.

“What?” Roland had closed his eyes, enjoying the tingling burst coming from his shoulders.

“This is the largest city in the West, right?” She whispered, “compared to Border Town, why don’t you want to stay in this more prosperous place?”

“The power structure in Longsong Stronghold is tangled and complicated, it isn’t suitable for doing what I want to do. And with my plan, we would keep the status quo, what isn’t so bad. If I want

to change it, the resistance I would encounter would only become larger, and if I would use cruel ways they would lump together trying to sweep me away.”

Roland smiled and said, “Of course the most important part is, that the people here in the stronghold are deeply affected by the church, so it would become difficult to get the people to accept you. I have once said, that I hope that the witches will be able to walk freely through the streets, and in Border Town, this is now possible.”

“Yeah,” Nightingale said softly, “you have already fulfilled your promise.”

Early on the third day, Petrov brought in his list in a hurry, and as usual Roland received him in the hall.

“Your Highness, I have made my decision.”

“I will take a look.” Said Roland and received the list from him. And just like he had expected, on top of the list with the biggest amount of needed points were serfs with the value of 2, about 800 people, also 100 cattle and 300 sheep for a total of 900 points, the rest were paid with all kinds of craftsmen.

“Your Royal Highness, is this acceptable?”

“Of course, you only had to scrap 3000 points together,” Roland

returned the list to him, “By when will you be able to gather all these people and supplies?”

“Today will be possible, at least in the case of the people and other properties they will stay in the Honeysuckle territory, but Your Highness, if you want to bring them back with you to Border Town, it may take about two weeks’ time.

“It’s up to you to organize the transport to Border Town,” said Roland, tapping the table. “As a merchant, you should have the experience of organizing a caravan.”

“Yes, sir.” Petrov hesitated for a moment, “Then my father...”

“You can take him back with you today,” said the Prince laughingly and handed him a parchment scroll. “If you think there is no problem with it, just sign it and imprint your thumb onto it.”

“This is... the representative’s contract?” Petrov only had read the beginning and then he spoke agitated. “Do you really promise to grant the right to govern over Longsong Stronghold to the Honeysuckle Family? Please wait for a moment.” He spread out the scroll and began to read the contract carefully.

Seeing that Petrov showed caution Roland nodded with satisfaction – as a collaborator, paying attention to the contracts is the most basic requirement.

After a while, Petrov raised his head, “This contract and what

you told me yesterday, is basically the same, but there is one thing..." He pointed to the end of the contract, "Your Royal Highness, shouldn't I write my father's name here? The Count is after all the representative of my family.

Roland smiled, "Of course not, it was you, not your father, who talked with me about the post as representative, so it's natural to write your name at the end of the contract."

For a moment Petrov became startled, he couldn't believe what he had heard so he asked: "Your Highness, you don't mean that – "

"Yes, you will take over the place of the Duke and rule over the stronghold," Roland nodded. "If you're able to fulfill the contract, you can continue to rule over the city even after I became the King." Here he paused and smiled, "But if you break the contract, you will meet the same end as the Duke – since I was able to break into Longsong Stronghold once, there is no problem to do it for a second time. Let's work well together, Mr. Ambassador."

Chapter 122 - Father And Son

The dungeons of the castle were not so dark and wet as the prison of Border Town, maybe the Duke didn't want to turn his basement into a haunted house, or smell the nauseating stench as soon as he descended the stairs. Generally speaking, the dungeon was still relatively clean. The cells were also differently decorated accordingly to its grade, some were empty, some were not only decorated with a bed, they even had a wardrobe, a desk and chandeliers were also readily available. Probably the cells were also a place for the Duke to keep some of the nobility, so the basic etiquette had to be guaranteed.

Roland also found a special cell in the corner, within it stood a large bed taking more than half the room, there were also chains hanging down from the ceiling, but the chain for the neck and hands were wrapped in layers of sheepskin and on the wall hung a variety of whips. It seems that Duke Ryan had also done conducted research in some areas, he thought, it's a pity that I have to leave in a few days, so I cannot analyze it carefully.

As the most valuable prisoner, Lord Hull was naturally in the best cell. If someone didn't focus on the external iron railings, they could think this was a luxury bedroom. Furthermore, he also had to share the room with Count Maple Leaf, Viscount Wolf, the eldest son of the Wild Rose Family and the second son of the Elk Family, together with the Ryan family these were the six ruling family of the Longsong Stronghold – of course, the Ryan Family had been destroyed by Roland, so his wife and his sons were kept in a cell next door.

When the other people saw that the Prince had appeared in the

dungeon, the nobles stood up, not waiting for them to start their questioning, Roland began first: “I will take Count Honeysuckle with me, so you can come out. As for the rest of you, we are still waiting for the ransom, the moment they pay I will let you out.”

“Father,” shouted Petrov at the moment when he saw him, then he glanced at his friend, and then to Roland, “Your Highness, I didn’t see the name of Count Elk on the list, if he died on the battlefield, the eldest son of the Elk Family should be now the head of the family, but at the moment he isn’t at home, so there is no one who could take over this job and Rene cannot be redeemed. But if you let him out, he could go home and organize his self-redeeming? I am willing to give a guarantee for him.”

“Do you mean the eldest son of the Elk Family, Jacques Medde?” Roland shook his head. “He already came back. Not only did he come back to the stronghold, no he even came to the castle yesterday, but... I don’t believe he will pay the ransom.”

Hearing this, Rene dashed to the front of the cage, “Why?”

“He said since you didn’t protect your father on the battlefield, it was the same as you being his executioner.”

“Why did he say this, the one who killed our father –” Rene immediately closed his mouth.

Roland didn’t take his outburst seriously “What you wanted to say, that it was obviously me who killed the count, right?” He went in front the cage. “Previously to the Months of the Demons, your

father sent intruders into my castle, trying to burn my food reserves,” said Roland. “And now he followed the Duke onto the battlefield, taking his knights to attack my territory. I merely started a counterattack, to repel the invaders. But now I’m the murderer? Shouldn’t it be Duke Ryan who had ordered your father to act be the one who gets condemned? In addition, if it were not for Hills’s statement that you did not know anything about the attempt to burn my food, you would already be a dead man by now.”

“...” Rene was left speechless.

“Your Royal Highness,” Petrov asked, worried. “If his brother doesn’t pay the ransom for him, will you kill Rene?”

“No that won’t be the case, after all, I’m always kind,” Roland grinned, “Most probably I will take him with me to Border Town, there he will work twenty years in the North Slope Mine to redeem himself.”

“How much is his ransom?”

“As a second son, he has no chance to inherit the title, the price for him is much smaller than for Count Honeysuckle, as long as someone pays a value of 1000 points in materials he can go.” Roland looked at him with interest, “How is it? Do you want to pay the ransom for him?”

“What value, a thousand gold royals?” Count Honeysuckle interrupted their talk.

“Your son will inform you later of what it means,” the Prince gave them the signal to move, “Come on, there is nothing for us to do down here. Since he is the second son of the Elk Family there is no need to rush it for a while yet, so you can go back and then slowly consider it.”

The entire group finally left the prison, when they came to the gate of the castle, the Count suddenly stopped, “Your Royal Highness, I know Duke Ryan acted sinfully and it’s unforgivable, but... His wife and son are innocent.”

“Perhaps,” Roland couldn’t deny his words, “I did not intend to sentence them to be exiled or to hang them and so on. I will just take them with me to Border Town and place them into the prison there.” Until the day I ascend the throne, he thought. Now it is not the time to be benevolent to a woman. Even if they aren’t guilty, he would get no benefits if he was to release them, furthermore, he would only bring another source of problems to himself – after all, the eldest son has had legal right of succession.

“What did you just say?” asked Shalafi Hull disbelieving and stared with open mouth at Petrov. “His Royal Highness doesn’t intend to live in Longsong Stronghold, and furthermore he even wants you to govern the stronghold for him?”

When they were back to Count Honeysuckle’s castle, Petrov immediately told his father everything that had happened during the last three days, when the other one heard about the

representative's contract, the Count couldn't bear to wait for another confirmation. He jumped up and walked through the study in circles, obviously feeling a very complicated emotion.

"Father, are you all right?" Asked Petrov worriedly.

"So it seems that our opponents are mainly Elk Family. Compared to them, the other three have neither the heritage nor the strength, so they shouldn't be a problem for us."

"What?" He couldn't follow what his father meant.

"You're such a disappointment," said the Count, "You really let me down, His Highness gave you such a good chance, but even now you haven't figured out who your opponents are."

"Uh, aren't you surprised?"

"You mean the fact that the Prince insists on going back to Border Town? Of course, I also think it's strange," the Count grasped his beard, "But his reasons have nothing to do with us, for us it's only important that the contract is true."

This is indeed the case, Petrov thought, I cannot believe that His Highness would go through all this trouble only to make fun of me, as for why he loves to live in Border Town, later I will have enough time to find out the true reasons. But I would never have thought that my father's ability to accept the new circumstance was this strong.

“Did I hear it right, is that Meede boy your friend?” Shalafi suddenly stood in front of Petrov, “Tomorrow, you will go over and redeem him.”

“You agree that I spend a thousand gold royals to redeem him?” Petrov got startled.

“Think about it, Count Elk died and the eldest son doesn’t want to redeem the second son, and during the battle, with the exception of a few knights, they had almost no losses. Once Jacques Medde took over the title, he will try to hinder your success in the future... No,” said the Count, “Why Jacques didn’t want to redeem Rene is because he is afraid that the other will be a threat him.”

Alright, it turns out this was the true reason, Perot smiled in his heart. But he also knew that his father was correct, Rene had grown up with swords and spears, furthermore, he was much closer to the knights within their territory, unlike Jacques the eldest son, who doesn’t have the body and air of a Lord, instead he preferred the debauched life of a noble.

Although Rene had repeatedly shown that he wanted to be a knight, but that was the time where he had no chance to inherent. But now that the Count was dead, who could guarantee that he wouldn’t ask for the help of the other knights, who could kill the eldest son for him? So why redeem a person who would later become a problem to himself, Jacques’s decision was very simple and ruthless.

“My friend would never do that,” he assured.

“Perhaps, but after you have redeemed him, Jacques will get a headache, whether he has any intention of doing so or not.” Shalafi further explained, “As for the materials worth 1000 points, we can just choose some more craftsmen.”

“When I prepared the ransom for you, I have already transferred some of our craftsmen, and in the case, I will now transfer even more, we won’t have enough craftsmen in our own territory.”

“Do not worry about it, you know that the North has become quite a mess?” explained the Count confidently, “Most of the four Kingdoms forces were killed at Hermes, so everywhere the Lords have forced the people into their armies, there is now a large number of refugees. We can just take this opportunity to eat a little more, like this we can even save some of our monthly payment.”

Hearing all these explanations, Petrov discovered that his father was also an expert businessman – at least his business ability was much stronger than his ability on the battlefield.

Chapter 123 - The Invitation Of The Church

It was already the fourth day since Roland had taken over the castle, today nearly all nobles in the surrounding areas were gathered inside the castle Grand Hall.

Although most people already knew of the news, Roland still felt that it was necessary to tell them personally that the Western territory now had a new ruler.

After he informed them about his intentions to move back to Border Town, and that the eldest son of the Honeysuckle Family would now rule in his stead, everyone had suddenly started discussing the news. Of course, no one was willing to take the lead at this time to stand up and object to it, after all, the Duke's head was still hanging above the city gate and news that King Timothy had suffered a great loss and couldn't send any external forces was now also known to everyone.

Furthermore, all the knights of the Honeysuckle Family had already been redeemed, while at the same time, he hadn't accepted any ransom for the other knights, so that the knights, together with the mercenaries, could all come back with him to Border Town. In Roland's plan, the mercenaries would be sent to the mine, where they could work to earn their freedom, and the knights would get a job offer in case they showed their repentance and had good manner – after all, most knights were literate and could thus also be used as teachers. Of course, for the rest of their life, they wouldn't ever be allowed to ever use a weapon again.

If it was handled like this, the Honeysuckle Family should have

enough power to hold the other four noble families back, and they should also have enough troops to defend Longsong Stronghold and their own territory as well, Roland thought. As for the invisible stirring undercurrent, it's a problem that Petrov will have to worry about on his own.

In the past few days, he also took the time to send some Border Town residents back, who had rebelled during the winter, where many people had died out due to hunger and the cold, including the former Finance Minister Ferrero, they would all face trial in Border Town. His only regret was that the mastermind behind the attempt to burn his food and the death of Grayhound, Count Medde had already been killed on the battlefield.

Today, the traffic between the Longsong Stronghold and Border Town has finally been restored, which meant that until the end of next week, many ships would sail upstream to Border Town to deliver the gathered supplies. Roland guessed that Barov would be very busy for the few next weeks. He had not only received a lot of looted gold coins, he also had to organize the resettlement of the large number of immigrants. Also it was still unknown whether Karl had built enough wooden sheds.

Thinking of this problems, he could not help but want to return to Border Town as soon as possible, in addition, the great farming operation also needed to start soon.

After entertaining all the nobles to lunch, Roland intended to take a nap, but then one of his guards announced a special guest.

The High Priest of the Church in Longsong Stronghold.

Hearing this, Roland suddenly had no thought of sleep left.

Longsong Stronghold was completely different from Border Town, here the Church had already been rooted for a long time, they not only had a church, they have even dispatched a High Priest to this place. This was also the Prince's main reason that he had decided to further develop Border Town rather than staying further in Longsong Stronghold – here, the people were already under the influence of the church for a long time and any of the civilian could become their eyes. Here, his plan to manipulate the people's view would become complicated and the risk that the witches would be discovered would also become much higher. Unless he completely unrooted the Church, his reforms would never get a chance to work.

Paying attention to the replacement of the ruler of Longsong Stronghold is a normal thing for the Church, so Roland wasn't too surprised that they would send him a representative to come into contact with him. However, the identity of the person they send was a bit special, as the High Priest of the Church he belonged to the most influential people of people, the area under his jurisdiction was of a similar size to that of a Duke.

Once more he decided to use the Grand Hall as the meeting place.

The High Priest Tylo seemed to be around 40 years old. He was dressed in the typical church-style with a white underrobe and a blue robe above it, giving him a very neat appearance and a behavior that was just like a courteous aristocracy. If he wasn't a member of the royal family and allied with the witches, Roland

believed that holding a conversation which such a person would have been a pleasure.

As the High Priest he had to be in possession of a high-quality God's Stone of Retaliation, so in order to avoid any accidents, Roland specifically told Nightingale before the meeting, that she should stay away from him during it.

After Tylo gave him a salute, Roland invited him to sit at the table and ordered some tea.

No matter what he thought, he had to at least show a welcoming atmosphere on the surface.

"Your Royal Highness, I'm here as a representative of the New Holy City," Tylo said with a smile, "You have become the veritable master of the Western territory, may God bless you."

"Thank you," Roland said in a relaxed tone. "You do not seem to care at all that I've gotten rid of Duke Ryan and taken over Longsong Stronghold."

"We rarely intervene in secular disputes, as long as the people can live a good life, he has to be a good ruler. So in which family he was born, or if he belonged to the royal family, it is not important to the Church. In fact, I think the church is much more open minded in this respect, previously I was only a farmer's son, and now I have became a High Priest," he smiled. "Excuse me, my Lord, but I don't believe that a mere farmer could become a Duke, right?"

If he launched an uprising to overthrow the royal family, he can even become the King. Roland thought, so he never spoke it out, instead, he went straight for the topic, “So why did you come today, was it only to deliver the blessing?”

“The blessing was only part of what I have come for, I also want to offer a cooperation between us.”

“Cooperation? What kind of cooperation?”

“We would help you with whatever you need to expand your territory or your forces.”

“Hold on...” Roland frowned. “You just said that the Church rarely intervenes in secular disputes.”

“Rarely intervention doesn’t mean no intervention,” said the High Priest, still casually. “I have said that as long as the people in this world have a smooth and peaceful life, we will not intervene. But the struggle between your brother Timothy and your third sister Garcia has resulted in widespread poverty throughout the south. In the beginning, we thought that Timothy deserved it and would become a respected King, but now we think he isn’t any longer worthy, you are such a man.”

Roland got a thoughtful look, it seems the Church has the desire to help me fight for the throne. He subconsciously asked. “Why?”

“You lead the people of Border Town to resist the demon beasts, and spend the whole Months of the Demons with them in Border Town, this all proves your courage and ability. And from the large amount of food you purchased from Willow Town everyone can see do not want your people to starve, which shows your kindness. With this you have the three grandeur characteristics a noble should have, furthermore, you are even of royal blood. All this are the reason why we chose you.

Roland didn’t believe one word the High Priest said, but at least it proved that, even if Border Town was at the edge of the country and was an independent island-state during the winter, they were still under the close watch of the church.

“How would you help? Would you dispatch an Army of Judges to fight for me?”

“Even though we want to quell the warring state in the south as soon as possible, but if we were to do something like you suggested we would arouse the resentment of most of the nobility. So we can only help you materially,” the High Priest took two pill out of his pocket, one was black the other was red, on both the sigil of the Holy City had been etched, “This is our equivalent to the drugs produced in your Alchemy Square. The red pills will temporarily make your men stronger, while the black pill reduces the feeling of pain and coldness and instead increases their endurance by several times. With these drugs, your army should become unstoppable, and the Church would only charge you the production cost,” for a moment Tylo paused, “One gold royal. These two pills, can be presented to you as a test product to prove that my statement is the truth.”

“What is the reward you are hoping for? Expanding the reach of the Church and building churches in every territory?”

“Of course this would make us happy, but our main intention is to end the war. As long as the people can have a peaceful life, they will naturally come into God’s arms.

Roland accepted the offered pills. “This sounds amazing, but for the time being, I have no intention of competing for the crown of the Kingdom of Graycastle, Both Timothy and Garcia are my close relatives and I do not want to hurt them.”

“I can understand your point,” the High Priest smiled reassuringly, “but sometimes the bonds of family cannot stop the temptation of power, especially when you become only a stumbling stone on the road to power for others. These pills will only be the beginning, there are still many other possibilities of how we could help you. If you decide to take that step, you can always come to the Church to find me.” Having said all of this, he stood up, bent down in salute, “With this I have already informed you of the Church’s intentions, may God be with you, Your Royal Highness.”

Chapter 124 - Return To Border Town

“I have probably never seen you lie as much as you have today,” Nightingale said as she stepped out from her fog right after Tylo has left.

“How was it for the Church’s High Priest,” Roland asked, “could you tell if he was lying?

“No, my sight was blocked by his God’s Stone of Retaliation, at the place where he was standing, I could only see a mass of darkness.

Unfortunately, he couldn’t treat the High Priest the same way that he has all the other nobles, Roland thought full of regret. He then placed the two pills on the table, “Tell me, do these pills really have some kind of miraculous effects?”

Reducing the pain, the same could be done by morphine, as for increasing the strength, it sounds like it increases the rate at which the adrenal gland releases hormones, the problem is how did they manage to extract these substances and make it into these pills? If the Church had such a high technical level, they should have conquered the world long ago.

Wait a minute... Roland suddenly thought of a possibility, could they have done it with magic?

“You are able to see the flow of magic, right?” He looked at Nightingale, “Can you see any traces of magic in these two pills?

Nightingale took the pills in her hand and gave them a close observation, but when she gave them back she could only say. “There is no magic to see, but for me, they resemble the God’s Stone of Retaliation a bit.”

“God Stone of Retaliation?” Roland asked in confusion.

“Well,” she nodded. “You were with me in my world of fog. It’s only black and white, but the darkness of the normal black and the darkness of the God’s Stone of Retaliation are different. From the latter, I sense a feeling of emptiness as if it was trying to swallow the world around it. I do not know how to better describe that feeling...” Nightingale hesitated. “Rather than speaking of a black hole, it’s more like there is nothing there at all.”

“Nothingness?”

“That’s right, they give off a feeling of nothingness,” she nodded acknowledging, “The two pills give me also a feeling of nothingness, but only very subtly, and... also it’s not a round hole, but rather a section of flowing thin black threads.”

“Can this ‘nothingness’ affect your ability?”

Nightingale grabbed the pills once more and suddenly entered the fog, only to reappear soon afterward, “They seem to have no effect on my ability.”

“I think it’s still better to take prisoners with a death sentence and let them eat these pills to try out their effects,” Roland wrapped a piece of paper carefully around the pills, only then did he put them into his pocket.

“I would never have expected that the Church would have such a good impression of you,” Nightingale said after she sat back by the Prince’s side, giving off a depressed feeling.

“If the High Priest didn’t wear his God’s Stone of Retaliation, I bet of the ten sentences he had spoken nine would be lies.” Roland said in disdain, “In the end, the most important point is that what they are offering and what they are asking for, simply don’t add together.”

“Why?”

“Look at what they want: More churches, more believers, a prince or king who only gains power with their support, and will henceforth spread their divine propaganda. A stable country is more conducive to the development of believers and the development of their power. Otherwise under the chaos of war, the church and the monastery would be reduced to refugees and become the target for robbing nobles.

“But can’t they just have taken a fancy for you, because you can bring the people a peaceful life?

“I don’t think so,” Roland shook his head, “Stability stems from unity or equilibrium, even if the king idles away only seeking

pleasure every day, the people would still be better off than those who are living within the countries that are at war. So if they were to support the 2nd Prince it wouldn't be so surprising, it would also not be strange if they were to decide to support my sister Garcia, but what is strange that they would come to me and offer their support – especially now after Garcia has just won against Timothy."

If the Church was to now fully support Garcia, I am afraid that the Eastern territories of the Kingdom would be swallowed by her in less than six months. With that around forty percent of the country would fall under the rule of the Queen of Clearwater, and the pressure I would have to face would start to exponentially increase.

Yet they don't support the strong, but instead they chose the most vulnerable candidate, from their point of view. This situation seemingly has to be advantageous to the Church. Assuming I was to accept their support, the already complicated situation in this country with two Kings would then become even more chaotic. The direct consequence of a three-sided war would be a sharp drop in population, a rapid loss of wealth and since the war would spread over the whole country its unifying it would only be delayed even more.

What advantage is there to the Church in this? Needless to say they won't get more believers, I'm afraid that even the churches built in all the cities will all be torn down until nothing is left.

"It seems you don't understand the nobles' way of thinking, they are always twisting and turning," Nightingale sighed.

“Well,” Roland replied laughingly, “I don’t belong to them.”

“...” Nightingale narrowed her eyes, staring at the Prince for a long time, “Strange, why wasn’t this a lie?”

*

Three days later, Roland had finally cleared out the castle and the stronghold’s library and was now sailing back on Little Town while very satisfied.

Along the Redwater River, near Border Town, the river scene has changed its appearance during the last few days. In the areas near Border Town which had been burned open by Anna there were now many people who were very busy – seeing their dresses, they should be the first serfs who had been transported to Border Town. And in the area near the Impassable Mountain Range, there were erected a number of simple wooden sheds. Within the sheds Roland could also faintly see some activity, he thought it should be the serf’s family.

These people were tied to the land for generations, their children would also be born as serfs, because of this they couldn’t see any hope, ending in living a life filled with numbness. Their motivation to work the land came not from their hearts, instead, it came from the slaver’s whips. The resulting low productivity was simply a great waste of human resources.

There was no doubt that slavery was the enemy of industrial

production and was a system which had to be abolished. But Roland did not intend to let them all turn into free hands, but he wanted to provide them a road out, so that they could see the hope of promotion to becoming free people – even if such a kind master was to give his slaves the possibility to get rid of their slave status was to be a precedent, this kind of compromise on handling serfs wouldn't arouse much attention even if the news was to circulate. At most, the other nobles would think that he was just a kind person, nothing more.

He only had to wait until the time was ripe in the future, then he would fully abolish slavery, by that time the resistance he would face would be much less.

The area near the pier was crowded with sailboats, making it clear that the small pier was unable to handle all these ships. Fortunately, Little Town was more of a light-craft, so it didn't need a dock to land. It seems that I also have to put the task of developing the pier on the schedule, Roland thought.

When he was finally back at the castle, he couldn't allow himself any time to rest, instead, he immediately went to his office to call Barov, letting him report about Border Town's actual situation and its materials.

The assistant minister has already been prepared for a long time now, so he only had to take out a roll of parchment out of his pocket and spread it out on the large wooden table.

"Your Royal Highness, the amount of materials you sent back to Border Town really scared me," that said, the upturned corner of

his mouth still gave away his mood, “twelve of my apprentices needed a whole night to count all the coins, which were more than fourteen thousand gold royals. This is equivalent to the annual income of an ordinary cities!”

To accumulate all these gold royals the Duke probably needed more than 20 years, Roland thought, most probably it's comes from the plunder and exploitation of the people in the Western territory. I have to turn them into food, steel, and machinery as soon as possible. “Those jewels, how much worth are the jewelry and handicrafts?”

“I haven’t had the time to convert them yet, by conservative estimates they are also worth around 10,000 gold royals, if they were auctioned in King’s City, their price would be even greater. But for now, they are only stored in the basement of your castle,” Barrow paused, “However, this means that the original storage room isn’t big enough for all the food, so I suggest that you will increase the castle’s area, building further storage warehouses to store other supplies.”

4th Saga - The Envoy

Chapter 125 - Municipal Development

“What can you tell me about the people they’ve sent?” Roland asked.

“That’s right, please take a look below,” the Assistant Minister pointed to the bottom of the parchment, “Until now 1’100 people were sent to Border Town. Most of them belong to the ranks of serfs, in accordance with your request have all been held outside of the town. The thirty-five craftsmen have been placed under Karl’s command and their homes are all located in the ‘New Civilization District’,” Barov spoke these unusual mouthful of the terms, “But Your Royal Highness, is this really okay? I thought that area had specially been prepared for the witches.”

“The people I have sent out to spread the news about the safe haven haven’t returned yet, their progress is slower than I would’ve imagined. So, the first houses will be used for the craftsmen and their families, we can still build more afterwards,” Roland’s plan was to renovate the whole Border Town, the wooden houses and mud cottages would be converted into brick houses, while at the same time leaving enough space for wide streets between the houses, rather than the alleys just wide enough for two people to walk side by side, that they had now.

“Understood,” Barov nodded, “Your Highness, I’ve heard that there will also be cattle and sheep being shipped here?”

“Ah that’s true. But not now, I deliberately let them come a few days later, they will come together with the shepherds. They will be sent to the grasslands between the western city wall, the

Concealing Forest and the Impassable Mountain Range; that should be a good area to turn into a pasture. We should reopen the destroyed part of the city wall and use it as an exit, after all, the wall is only useful during the Months of the Demons.

For now, they finally had enough people and money to break through the bottleneck and allow Border Town to develop further, so Roland was finally able to use all of his otherworldly knowledge.

He called one of the guards into his office and ordered them: "Go find Karl and tell him to meet me in the executive office, I guess if he isn't at the mine he will certainly be at the new area outside the town.

Half an hour later, Karl walked into the office and bowed in greeting to Roland. "Your Highness."

It has been nearly six months since he had seen the mason for the first time and since he had been recruited into the staff of the Town Hall, he could be regarded as the busiest official in the last half-year. First he had to preside over the construction of the city walls, and then there were the houses in the new district and the temporally wooden sheds for the new inhabitants of Border Town. Now, on his thirty-five-year-old silhouette, he revealed the first few strands of silver and his skin has also started darkening from always being outside. But the spirit Roland had seen burning in him at their first meeting was still burning as strong and hot as ever before.

That a new environment could quickly change a man was true. Only six months ago Karl was still carefully trying to hide himself,

clearly busy running away from trouble. But now, as an experienced project commander who had personally been in charge of several people, even his gestures showed some hints of him feeling in power. But what Roland appreciated the most, was that he was always still willing to accept the thoughts of other people.

Roland acknowledged his greeting with a smile, “Please sit, and come take a look at his.” He handed him some sketches that he had previously drawn, “You see, I need you to build something new for me.”

“This building looks like a warehouse. Well, building it with its base placed on stilts it would be safe against incoming floods,” Karl quickly swept over the first sketch and then turned to the second one and after looking for a while he asked, “Is this supposed to be a furnace?

“Yes, I need you to build more than five of these furnaces near the North Slope Mine, they will be needed to calcine the cement and to burn clay bricks. So, you have to find an empty spot which still has good transport channels and the area should be spacious enough so that we can still later build some more furnaces there.”

“I understand.” Karl now turned his view to the last sketch and immediately frowned after he saw it, “This... seems to be sewers? No, there is also a roof and walls... and the area behind it looks like a pond. Your Royal Highness, I seem to be unable to make sense of this.”

Roland laughed, “This is a toilet, and will also be your

construction project of the highest priority.”

“A toilet?” Karl thought about it, “Your Highness, where do you plan to build them? For this, you already have chamber pots placed in your castle, and your attendants are responsible for cleaning them on a regular basis. Most of the villagers don’t even use them, instead, they are doing it directly outside of their houses,” Karl explained. “The same is also true for the serfs, which can directly discharge their filth into the Redwater River, and the river will then take their filth away.”

So, that was the strong smell I smelled today at the dock, Roland shook his head, trying to erase these unpleasing thoughts, “If that is the case, we need to change this bad habit as soon as possible.”

“Uh... bad habit?” Karl still didn’t seem to understand what the Prince’s meaning.

For a commoner who was accustomed to urinating at any place, it was naturally hard for them to understand, how beautiful a casual stroll could be without having to fear stepping on a landmine, Roland criticized privately. “Anyway, you only have to follow these sketches, I have already roughly marked their size, so you only have to use this distance. Within the vicinity of the wooden shed district, you should build at least four toilets, always two side by side. In addition, the wall in the middle of the ditch should be built out of brick, while the outside walls and the roof have to be built out of wood, like this you can save a lot of cement.”

“Your Highness, you want to build them side by side... that...,” said Karl slowly, evidently, he thought that talking about this dirty

theme with His Highness was clearly degrading the royalty's dignity. "But what should we do when they don't use them?"

"I will issue orders which they will have to follow. You just have to build them; I will take care of the rest."

"Alright if that's the case," Karl said, nodding his head. "There is another matter I want to discuss with you, Your Royal Highness.

"You may speak."

"The mason's guild was forced to disband and now there are many people like me, who all chose to leave King's City. I would like to write a few letters to those masons who already know where I went and try to recruit them to Border Town. They all have their own area of specialization, for example, for the furnace, Lesya would be the best at it. However, Your Highness I do not know... "

"That's no problem at all," Roland said immediately. " I will recruit all the masons you're able to attract, and they will be paid according to their experience and skills, and they will also have the possibility to enter the town's hall."

"Thank you for your generosity," Karl bowed once more then he left.

When the mason had stepped out of the hall, Roland began to write down his plan for the managing the serfs and how he wanted to disband the slavery system.

Border Town's population had already started to rapidly increase with no end in sight, but as long as they had to dependent on importing food, the town would be in jeopardy if a natural disaster was to occur or the road to the other cities was cut off. Therefore, in addition to increasing and developing industry, development in the area of agriculture was an even higher priority. Border Town had to achieve the level of self-sufficiency as soon as possible.

The Prince believed that as soon as he was able to implement his ideas, the serfs could be turned into farmers, and combined with Leaves' improved seeds, the area around the Redwater River would soon become a golden wheat ocean.

Regarding the high priority of the toilet, it also had to do with the development of the agriculture – with enough people, land and seeds, the last thing he still needed was the right kind of fertilizer.

Roland certainly knew how troublesome it was to produce fertilizer out of human and animals' excrements, they had to regularly clean the storage pond, but they also had to rely on human manure, in the end, it was clearly inconvenient. But for now he didn't have any clue of how to produce it on industrial level, so for the present, he had to rely on this pure natural and organic fertilizer – at least human-animal manure had already been used for a long time, even during the twentieth century some of the rural areas were still using this traditional fertilization.

Many people only had very little knowledge about fertilizer, the vast majority of them just thought that a stool was a dirty thing, and that they should never believe that besides of spreading nausea

it could ever have any useful effects. Thus, to cultivate the fields each year, the farmers were still using the three-rotation system. For it a piece of arable land would be divided into three parts, taking turns for spring sowing, sowing in autumn and resting phase, all this was done to avoid the depletion of soil fertility due to constant use.

Chapter 126 - Wheat Transformation

For villages and small towns, it didn't matter whether or not they used the rotation farming system. However, for big cities where the surrounding land was scarce, this system wasted a lot of land. For example, Silver City, Fallen Dragon Ridge, and King's City were such places, so every month they had to import a large amounts of grain from other cities.

The first step in using fertilizer was to collect the manure. This was also the reason why Roland decided to establish the public toilets as soon as possible. With the toilets, he could reduce the spreading of disease and even beautify the living environment; it was such a simple action but it offered so many improvements.

His goal was for the toilets to already be constructed by the time the rest of the new citizens have been shipped over. As for teaching them how to use compost and cultivate the arable land, Roland decided to select a small group of experienced farmers during the next few days and teach them the system first. After all, the land was still in its clean-up phase, and it would still need at least a week before it would be useable.

After finishing all the work at hand, he decided to go meet Leaves at the back garden and take a look at her experiments.

Since Leaves improved all categories of seeds, there could be seen many different kinds of crops in the garden. She has also followed Roland's suggestion and divided her farming area into several small blocks which were all given a number. With this, she could compare the developments of two groups of test crops.

When Roland stepped into the yard, he was stunned by the picture of golden and dazzling wheat swaying in the wind in front of his eyes.

“Your Royal Highness.” When Leaves, who was squatting beside one of her fields became aware of the Prince, she immediately stood up and bowed in greeting.

“Are these the results of your improvements?” He waved his hand trying to stop Leaves from going through the ritual greeting went then to pick one of the wheat plants, feeling the caryopsis with his fingers.

Previously he had no idea what the wheat would look like, but in contrast with the wheat fields in the prince’s former memories, those were not only smaller than the ones in his hand, they also had a lot fewer grains.

Leaves nodded in acknowledgment, “I let the wheat grow with my magic, then I harvested the ripe seeds and then planted the seeds once more, what you have in your hands is the result I got out of it. However... I repeated this process several times, but after two or three rounds of planting, it became difficult to grow the wheat as long and large as before, and I just can’t understand where the problem lies.”

Unfortunately, I cannot help you with that, Roland thought. According to his own pitiful junior high school biology knowledge, it was probably because of self-intersection defects? In the

southern area there were only rice seeds, which were poles apart from wheat. So in order to raise the output they always had to purchase new seeds. But even with only two generations of planting it still had a practical value, after all, one wheat plant can produce more than 130 seeds, and if he let Leaves first transform the generation of seeds, and afterward let the farmers use those seeds, he could still use the seeds for two years.

“Why is this one empty?” Roland asked when he noticed a field with only a few dry straws.

This is the area where I planted first, but perhaps because I had planted here too many cycles,” Leaves was clearly unsure. “I can only let the plants grow when I cast my magic, but when I remove my magic they will wither soon after.

It seems that even when she used her magic to let the plants grow she still used up the land’s supply of nutrition, and without the nutrition, the plants could not survive. Roland went to the last flower bed, there the planted wheat had a very strange shape, on an arm-thick stalk of wheat with several blue grain ears, and the center stalk even had several branches which were with green leaves. So, the volume of grains per plant were very large, but on the whole field, there were only two plants.

This was the area Roland has asked Leaves to create new plants like a ‘wheat tree’.

He had envisioned to turn a wheat plant into something similar to a banana tree, where he could harvest the fruit from the branches, with the possibility of a regular harvest, thus

eliminating the need for sowing, and if they could grow even larger, they would get more green leaves, improving the photosynthesis and reducing the land requirements. But at present, the thick and solid wheat stalks together with its branches took a lot of space, furthermore the grain ears would only grow on the top of the stalks and branches which weren't what he had originally imagined. Perhaps, should I ask Leaves to transform them in the direction of grape vines? Roland thought, after all, Leaves had never seen real banana trees, but grapes were not a rare product within the Kingdom of Graycastle, and as long as she had an image it should be easy for to imitate.

"The seeds of these three wheat plants cannot be used for sowing," Leaves explained, "I tried already, but the seeds wouldn't germinate after they were planted. However, they can still be harvested several times, you see the grains are the second batch."

Can't germinate means that every plant would be a unique wheat tree and that Leaves would have to personally create every tree, so for the current situation, it doesn't have any true value.

"You have done a great job. The wheat plant with the big grain ear will be called golden one. I will create a test field for you south of the Redwater River, it will be surrounded by fences and clapboards, to hide it from the view of other people. There I hope we will soon harvest a batch of golden ones. As for the garden, you can continue to use it to improve and create new wheat varieties. I also came up with a lot of new ideas, not only for the wheat crops but also for the grapes," said Roland.

Unfortunately, Leaves only has a macro level understanding of

the characteristics of a crop, so she can only change it to get more fruits, sweeter taste, denser branches and so on... If she could understand it on a micro-level, she wouldn't only be able to manipulate the genes, wouldn't she also be able to fine tune it? Such that the plants could even absorb light other than from the visible spectrum – such as ultraviolet, x-rays, and even ionizing radiation for photosynthesis, getting a direct output of starch, glucose, sucrose and other energy storage substances, so that we could directly harvest what is needed.

During the evening, the 4th Prince lit a bonfire near the Redwater River, and let Carter and his guards gather all the serfs together. A huge cauldron with more than 128-liter capacity was brought over and placed on the frame of a new simple mud stove, to cook congee over the fire.

With the fire at his back, the serfs could only see the narrow image of their new Lord, and the moment they became aware of him they would fearfully lower their heads. Only some of them were bold enough to secretly glance at the Prince from time to time.

Roland who stood in front of the bonfire began to announce his new rules to the crowd of more than a thousand people.

“I am Roland Wimbledon, the 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle, the Lord of Border Town, and the Ruler of the Western territories.”

“Today you were all summoned here, the day that you came to my territory was your lucky day! As long as you work hard, you

can break away from your current status and place!"

"That is right, I will give you a chance to get rid of your status as slaves, becoming free people!"

Hearing this within the serfs an uproar broke out. The serfs clearly knew what a status as a free person meant, they could no longer be cruelly abused by their owners, without any rest always forced to carry on farming endlessly, and they would no longer have to turn over the crops they produced on their fields to their owners, their sons and daughters would no longer be turned into the next generation of serfs.

Roland waited for a moment to let them calm down then he continued, "From tomorrow onward, each of you will get a fixed field assigned to him, and at the same time someone will guide you in the process to get a better harvest. In the first year, 30% of your harvest will belong to you, while the other 70% will belong to Border Town. The people who get the best harvest results will be promoted to free people!"

"After becoming a freeman, your family will be exempted from slavery, and then you can decide if you want to continue farming or if you want to find another occupation in the town, it will be your own decision. If you choose to continue farming, 20% of your harvest will belong to Border Town as rent, while the other 80% will belong to yourself. Later you can buy the land from the Lord and then you will no longer have to transfer any food to the castle!"

After his last word faded away, only the sound of breathing could

be heard, until someone shouted, “Your Royal Highness, was what you said was really the truth?”

“Of course,” Roland answered, stressing every word. “As a Lord, I would never deceive my own people.”

“His Royal Highness is merciful,” some people couldn’t help themselves from saying out loud, then the sound quickly became louder, “Long live His Royal Highness the Prince!”

Suddenly the first serf in front of him kneeled down, followed soon by the second person, then the third person...

Until the whole mass of people kneeled in front of him, still calling his name, getting louder and louder. Until the thousands of voices turned into the same rhythm, “His Royal Highness the Prince!” “Long live the Prince!”

Hearing the crowd so clearly understanding his intent, there was no need for him to drag things out for any longer, the Prince thought to himself.

He clapped his hands then said to the bodyguard behind him, “Bring the meal!”

Chapter 127 - Wendy

When Roland fell asleep, Nightingale emerged out of the fog, stepped to the side of his bed and gently straightening the quilt, covering an exposed arm. Then for a moment she quietly stood beside the bed watching the sleeping Roland, she then quietly slid through the floor, back to her own room.

“You’re not already asleep?” Seeing Wendy sitting on the bed and reading, Nightingale was slightly surprised.

“I’m afraid you would do something stupid!” Wendy glared at her, “His Royal Highness is not a child, is it really necessary for you to take care of him until he finally fell asleep?”

“His Royal Highness has sent people to other towns to spread the news that the Witch Cooperation Association is here, so I have to be at his side in the case someone heard the news of the witches and now wants to harm His Highness.”

Nightingale picked up a wet towel and cleaned her face with it. Followed by unlocking the red belt around her hip, taking off the bands of her leather wrist and body armor, then finally slipped out of her white clothes – this dress was His Highness’ newest creation, with a pure white hood coat she wouldn’t gather too much attention and thus it was the right clothes for an assassin, at least it was what he thought.

Nightingale carefully hung up her clothes, the smoothed out every fold. Afterward, she wrapped her sexy and curvy body

within a piece of light muslin. On her flat stomach and thighs not even a single trace of fat could be seen.

“There is no possibility an accident could happen,” said Wendy, putting down the book, “There are sisters within the castle and there guards outside patrolling and furthermore, didn’t you yourself put a stone under his pillow? I can never understand how you can touch such a thing.”

“Well, I’m still responsible for ensuring his safety,” Nightingale said while sitting down on the edge of the bed, taking off her boots and revealing her young and slender legs, then laying down and turning in Wendy’s direction.

“Didn’t you listen to what I said last time,” Wendy sighed.
“Veronica, we are witches.”

“I know, Wendy,” Nightingale nodded. “Yes, we are Witches.” And His Royal Highness said that he will marry a witch – this came out of his own mouth, and... it wasn’t a lie.

Of course, this information could not be told lightly it could only be used as a last resort, so Nightingale didn’t give it away. Within her heart, she said sorry to Wendy and then changed the subject: “What’s your impression of the church?”

“Why would you suddenly asked this?” hearing this question Wendy clearly became startled.

“When I was at His Highness side in the stronghold’s castle, the High Priest paid him a visit and offered to support him in conquering the throne.”

“How did he answer?” Wendy’s voice became strained. “Or did he order you to leave previously to the start of the conversation?”

Nightingale smiled and shook her head, softly saying. “He just asked me to avoid the range of the other side’s God’s Stone of Retaliation, and His Royal Highness didn’t wear that thing himself. Wendy, His Highness did not agree to the invitation of the church, he refused their offer.”

The latter clearly felt relieved, then she said with a bit melancholy, “Unfortunately, our help to His Highness is limited, unlike the Church, whose forces cover the entire continent. If His Royal Highness took their offer, I’m afraid he would soon be able to sit on the throne...”

“Only God knows... His Highness said the High Priest spoke only a mouthful of baloney, that no one should trust him,” Nightingale paused, “There was another important matter.”

Taking out the red and black pills, “In the fog, the pills have the same color as the God’s Stone of Retaliation, this is inconceivable. Both of us know that the sisters who were discovered to be witches would swallow the God’s Stone of Retaliation, which is no different from committing suicide. The High Priest said that the pills were produced inside the Prayer Room in the Holy City, and I remember that you used to live there in a monastery. Did you have ever heard of such an organization? ”

Wendy had helped Nightingale to leave Silver City and during their run, she had set up traps for the bounty-hungry villains who were following them, at the same time it was also a kind of revenge – one method was to force them to swallow their own God's Stone of Retaliation. After swallowing the villain would soon die, the whole body would roll up like it was suffering from dehydration, and would look like a fish exposed to the scorching sun.

"I never heard of something like that," Wendy, closed her eyes and began slowly to tell, "Since the first moment I can remember, I've lived in a monastery in the Old Holy City, surrounded by high walls, with no view of the sky beyond. Everything was taught to us with hospitality by the nuns, things like reading and writing or the understanding of maps. I still remember the name of my teacher, Faria. She once gave us a book to read, it was the special introduction about the Old Holy City. There were churches in the city, monasteries, libraries, memorial halls and heroic walls, but I have never heard of a prayer Room in the city. I lived in the monastery for more than 10 years, until the accident happened..."

Wendy had already previously mentioned to Nightingale that the monastery was one day attacked by a witch and many people also died during that attack. Taking advantage of the whole chaos, Wendy was able to get out of the monastery, "Also I don't know which witch had so much courage to dare to challenge the church alone, but she saved you at least."

"No, Veronica, the witch came from inside the church," Wendy shook her head, "She was, like me, a member of the monastery."

“What... do you mean?”

“The girls living in the monastery could be divided into three groups, one group consisted out of people like me, who stayed from early age in the monastery, not knowing their own origins; one were orphans who lived on the streets and were adopted by the local church and afterwards sent to the monastery; and the last group consisted out of girls sold to the church by their own parents. We were all separated by age and placed into different quarters, and even the teaching wasn’t the same. From an early age onward we learned how to recognize the words, from ten to fourteen years old we studied carols and after fourteen we were schooled in etiquette. The early classes were called the literacy class by the nuns, and the older classes were called the choir class and the ceremony class. Once we became adults we would be sent away from the monastery.

This was the first time that Nightingale heard the other speaking about this – before, Wendy had never elaborated on her experience during her life in the monastery.

“During the first few years, I could often hear other girls screaming during the night – the screams came out of the direction of the choir classes and ceremony classes. I didn’t understand what was going on until I was old enough to get into the choir classes. Then I found out that during the nights higher ranks of the church would visit the dormitory, always dragging a few girls out of their beds, and only at daybreak the next day would they be sent back. But sometimes... not all of the girls would come back again.”

Nightingale clenched her lips, of course, she clearly knew what

Wendy meant.

“This kind of thing would happen once or twice a month, frequently even two days successively. Then it was the day that I was selected. It was Faria who pulled me out of the room, whispering all the while into my ear that I should just bear with it, everything would become well. I was dragged by her into the corner of the garden where a room was built halfway underground. The room was brightly lit, at one side I could see how the females of the ceremony class being tortured, there were four to five men...” Her voice slightly shook. “When they came over to me, one of the women suddenly broke out from her shackles, grabbing the man closest to her, grabbed him by the neck and killing him just like he was a chicken, easily twisting his neck.”

“She... had awakened?”

“I do not know,” Wendy shook her head, “those men had taken off their clothes, but they still wore their God’s Stone of Retaliation around their necks, but she was still able to kill one after another. Of them, she seemed to want to skin alive, tearing one limp off after another, while he was still living. The last words he said before his death were... ‘an extraordinary’. The screams of the men alerted the guards and Faria who stood outside of the room. They immediately opened the iron gate and rushed in, but the scene in front of them rooted them on the spot, while the other woman directly rushed in their direction.”

“Was she a witch?” Asked Nightingale thrilled, “Were the guards also not an opponent for her?”

“The gap was simply too great. I later learned that those guards belonged to the Army of Judges. One of them blew his whistle while the other drew his sword. However, when the first one stopped blowing his whistle, she had already stepped in front of him, and penetrated his chest with her arm. In front of her, their armors were nothing more than a thin piece of paper.”

Chapter 128 - Pill Test

“Then, she picked up the Judge’s sword, stabbed Farisa, and split the other Judge into two halves, even cutting the guard’s sword in two. However, the whistle had alerted the whole monastery, many guards carrying oil lamps were on their way to us. She then peeled off Farisa’s clothes and wore them herself, then took another man’s weapon and walked in the direction of the rushing guards by herself.”

“I sat in the room full of a bloody mess for a while before I finally recovered. I discovered that one of the dead men was in charge of the keys to the entrance of the monastery, so I went over and dug out the keys from the scattered clothes. At the same time, I also stripped the stones around their necks. I didn’t know what effects they had, I only thought I might be able to sell them for a little money with their crystal clear appearance. The nuns of the monastery, the guards, and the Judges were all attracted by that other woman, and so I could get to the hidden back door without being noticed. There, I had to try several keys before I finally found the right key to open the door and flee from the monastery.”

“Later, I was only able to sell one stone because the rest of them were snatched away from me. Thus I had to rely on the ten silver royals I’d gotten for the one stone during my journey. Two years later, I reached the Seawind Region and had to stop; it was also the time of my awakening,” Wendy paused for a while. “That’s my whole story.”

Nightingale just silently held Wendy’s hands for a long while, until she asked, “What happened to the other women in the church?”

“Perhaps they all died, or they were able to escape just like me. I had asked around, but I only learned that the Church had said that there was a fire in the monastery and that they had to shut it down. No one knew it and even more, no one cared what had happened to the girls. They had all just been abandoned.”

Nightingale used a soothing voice while holding Wendy in her arms, “Now you have us. Everything will become well, so sleep, Wendy.”

After a long time, she finally heard a gentle, “ah...”

The next morning, Roland entered his office while yawning, there he saw Nightingale as always sitting by his table, but this time she had a serious expression on her face.

“Well, what happened?”

“Have you ever heard of something called an ‘extraordinary’?” She asked.

Seeing the Prince shaking his head, Nightingale repeated the story she had heard yesterday from Wendy. “If she hadn’t had her awakening, I can’t imagine a young woman who could so easily decapitate a heavily armed Judge.”

“A witch who isn’t influenced by the God’s Stone of Retaliation...” after listening to Roland thought for a while about what she had heard from Wendy, he started thinking about his own categorizing of the witch abilities, “Maybe she belonged to the type of self-enforcing witches?”

“What, type...?”

Roland took out a piece of paper from his drawer and handed it over to her, “I made a basic classification of your abilities based on the way you use your magic. A self-enforcing type witch constantly consumed her magic power and strengthens herself. Although all witches gets their physical fitness improved due to their magic, the self-enforcing type witch is much more powerful in this aspect. If I have it right then Scroll should also belong in the category of extraordinary in the eyes of the Church.”

“Scroll?” Nightingale couldn’t believe it, “But she...”

“She is not good at fighting, true,” Roland finished her sentence amused, “This classification doesn’t judge the personal strength of a witch and also isn’t necessarily correct, they are only my personal thoughts and speculations. As a self-enforcing type witch, she really could cause a lot of trouble to the Church. Without the protection of the God’s Stone of Retaliation, she could easily kill a squad of Judges, or single-handedly destroy the church of a small town. But in the end, a person’s power is still limited, and the ratio of witches awaken to a self-enforcing ability is much smaller than the other two types, otherwise it would be witches who would be hunting the believers of the Church.” Though he had spoken with ease, but when thinking about the red and black pills, he still had a

vague feeling of unease.

There were clearly only a few extraordinary class witches, during the last hundreds of years, there can't be more than a dozen, right? As long as there were two or three self-enhancing types, they could easily cause great chaos for the Church. For example, they could easily take advantage of the annual Months of Demons. During this time the Church would focus all of their energy on defending Hermes, so they could attack the church's facilities in other cities such as churches, priests, nuns and then kill all of them. So after repeating it for several years, the church's number of followers would have been greatly reduced.

However, in addition to Wendy encounter with the extraordinary, Roland had never heard of a witch counterattack the church, moreover, the home during Wendy's childhood was set on fire and the whereabouts of all the nuns and women were unknown.

The Church would never sit still, he thought, perhaps they have already discovered a means against the extraordinary class, and maybe those two pills were part of it.

Now matter what, he had to test those pills first.

Coming to this conclusion, Roland called for one of his guards, sending him to the jails and get one of the prisoners together with Carter.

He placed the test site outside of the city walls.

Just in case, Roland transferred over four members of the First Army, to surround the test site, fully armed and always alerted.

In addition to him and Nightingale, there was also Anna and Nana on station by the wall. As long as the other one didn't have a God's Stone of Retaliation, Anna's wall of green fire would be enough to guarantee their own safety while Nana could provide the most efficient kind of treatment.

"You won't have any problem, right?" Roland leaning forward over the edge of the wall, asked Carter, who was standing at the bottom of the wall, "Don't look down on your opponent."

"Your Highness, my rank as a knight isn't only for show," Carter said before placing a helmet on top of his head, "Furthermore my opponent only has a wooden sword, he can't hurt me at all."

The test subject was a murderer and robber and for this sentenced to death, even so, Roland didn't like to use him as a test object. So, he bluntly offered the prisoner that in the case that he took part in the test, his family would get five gold royals as remuneration. The other side hesitated for only a moment, before he immediately agreed to the condition.

Carter had hoped that the other side would also put on an armor and would also pick up an iron sword so that he could have a fair contest, but Roland had refused without any hesitation. If the murderer had a sharp weapon, the danger would be multiplied, and if he was to cut off Carter's head, even Nana would have no way of

saving his life. As for the reason that he wasn't wearing any armor, it was to test if the black pill really enhanced tolerance to pain.

The prisoners swallowed the two pills, and the expression on his face quickly changed, the veins on his forehead and arms all turned blue, while his skin turned a deep red and his breathing started to race. He grabbed the wooden sword, calmly waiting for the knight to react, then suddenly, he dashed forward. His speed was comparable to a running wolf and every time he stepped on the ground, small pits would be dug into the soil.

Seeing this, even Carter was clearly shocked, but he still unhurriedly stepped to the side, while at the same time delivering a cross cut. This move forced his enemy to change his direction, otherwise, his rib cage would be cut open.

However, his opponent was still just a very vicious murderer, he hadn't undergone any combat training. So, he was caught by surprise, getting a deep cut in his chest area, out of which a huge amount of blood started to pour out. Such injuries were enough to affect the activity of half of his body, but he still didn't show any sign that he cared about it, he just turned into the knight's direction. He tried the same tactic as before, yet this time he changed it a little, the moment they passed each other, the prisoner stretched one arm towards the knight's sword hand, in this awkward position he was unable to use much power, but the moment Carter swept out with his sword he could only see the shadow of the murderer, he subconsciously moved the sword into a parrying position, and was immediately hit by a strong force, which pushed him two steps back. The moment the wooden sword crashed into the iron sword, it immediately shattered into many pieces.

“That only took a little more effort of me,” Carter shook his numbed hand, “give him another sword so that he can come again.”

The prisoner did not take the offered sword, instead, he suddenly turned around, and directly rushing in the direction of the Concealing Forest, in the blink of an eye he was already out of Carter’s reach, his speed was comparable with a galloping horse, and he was unable to be caught by an ordinary person. The murderer stretched his arms in front of himself, running directly into the body of a soldier who was prepared to shoot, and pushed him to the side.

The soldier let out a wretched cry and was sent flying. At this moment, the other soldiers were finally able to pull the trigger, the prisoner was clearly hit and also left some blood behind, but his speed was still not reduced in the least, he quickly broke out of the encirclement, and after a few seconds he had already covered a distance of several tens of meters.

“Do not let him run,” Carter shouted, “Get me my horse!”

Before Carter had even the chance to jump on his horse, the prisoner suddenly stood still, and stared with an incredulously look at his abdomen, there a horizontal cut had cut his abdominal cavity wide open, and his intestines started falling out.

He slowly turned his gaze to his back, only to see a woman completely in white standing behind him, holding a silver dagger

in her hands. He had no idea where she suddenly came out from.

Chapter 129 - The Evening Course Starts Again

Nana quickly healed the injured soldier, something like a fracture was easy for her to heal. Afterwards, Roland let the First Army return to the camp, only the Chief Knight, the witches and several guards were still left at the scene.

With a gloomy face, Roland went to the side of the dead murderer, commanding Carter to cut out the bullets.

The wounds he had to cut were half a finger deep and the lead balls he found were fractured, indicating that people taking the pills would suffer the same wounds as ordinary people.

“Carter, what do you think?” Roland asked.

Carter seemed to be a little upset, most probably he had never expected to be outmaneuvered by a person who had never received any training in swordsmanship, “He just became stronger and faster, it doesn’t seem he realized everything that he could do, I could have cut off his head with the first strike.”

“And if your opponent was a knight?”

“This would...” Carter thought. “If it was against the kind of knights the Duke had, I could just barely handle them, but against the King’s elite knights or the knights of the Cold Wind Ridge, I wouldn’t have been able to parry even one of their strikes.”

Roland didn't comment, but he thought, the great experts always think the one with the better skills will win the fencing duel, and perhaps Carter's perception was right, but if they had the same equipment the situation would have dramatically changed. Assuming that the prisoner was also wearing heavy armor, with a helmet and a two-handed sword, Carter wouldn't have necessarily won so easily.

The pills didn't only bring a large power upgrade, they are much more multi-faceted. They can even carry stronger heavy armors and weapons, can burst out, run faster and have a much longer endurance on the battlefield. Roland felt he had to correct the assumption he had made during his time in Longsong Stronghold, Similar to adrenaline? No, this pill was much more terrifying than adrenaline, hormones only stimulated the body's own potential, but this red pill had clearly allowed the prisoner to break through his limits. Especially the speed and momentum he showed as he tried to flee, it was almost comparable to that of heavy cavalry.

The black pill was just as effective; his ribcage was nearly cut open but he didn't show any sign of it hindering him at all. If he was only a normal person, he would have long since lost his will to fight due to the extreme pain.

If a civilian with only a strength upgrade and pain reduction was already this powerful, then what would a group of trained knights using it look like? Roland had a feeling of uneasiness when he thought back to the offer the High Priest had made.

"Your Highness," exclaimed Nightingale suddenly, "look at his

skin.”

The skin of the prisoner’s hand had turned from its former red to ash-colored, while at the same time it had a large number of folds, looking just like a snake after it shed its skin. When Roland poked against it with the handle of his knife, he discovered that the skin was no longer solid like a muscle, it was rather totally empty to his touch. After cutting the skin, he saw that the subcutaneous fat had completely turned into mucus and it followed with the muscle atrophying.

“It looks just the same as when someone swallows a God’s Stone of Retaliation,” Nightingale turned to look at him with a serious expression on her face. “The pill is made from the same components as the stone.”

It’s unlikely that just swallowing a stone would result in such a growth of power,

Roland thought, so how were they able to do that?

It seems that the pills have very strong side effects, and until now it’s unclear if it’s permanent or if it can be restored, Roland himself was more inclined to the former. If it was the latter, this enhanced version of a drug out of morphine and adrenaline could be called the “God of War”, as long as they were able to recover and took it in batches, it wouldn’t be surprising if the world was dominated by the Church.

Even if the pills only lasted for a short time, and even if the pills

have side effects, it's still better to be on the alert, Roland thought. If the Church begins to support Timothy or Garcia with these, I would have to face an army of drugged fighters.

Even more disturbing is that the Church was even willing to take out such kind of drugs, they didn't seem to care what happens after the reunification of the Kingdom of Graycastle, how should the new King help them after exploiting this kind of pills? Graycastle's troops would only become cannon fodder, so the New and Old Holy City would have to send out more of their own troops, and with every continuing fight, the Army of Judges would gradually become worn down.

Unless... they have an even stronger card held back and just don't care if something like this was to happen.

Coming to this conclusion Roland could only sigh. With his attack on the Longsong Stronghold, he had intended to end his problem of population and capital shortage in Border Town. Afterwards, he could start focusing on developing the education level, the production and the farming process, turning Border Town from a town into a city in a very short time. As for him developing a new weapon systems, he had planned to put it on hold. But now it seems he couldn't stop the development of the First Army, expanding the First Army, increasing the flintlock production and developing new weapons was now back on top of his priority list, for example a breech-loading rifle with a new kind of bullet.

The mechanism of a breech-loading rifle was actually quite simple, the cachet for the bullet was also quite easy to produce, he

could make it out of paper or a very thin copper case.

Only to find for the right powder mixture, Roland still did not have even a trace of a clue. He only knew that the ingredient was called mercury fulminate, according to its literal meaning, the raw materials must have nitric acid and mercury. As for the need to mix it with other materials, he couldn't remember it. Furthermore, it had a special temperature and humidity requirements, so the chance was relatively high that it would explode in one's finger if handled carelessly. So, he decided that it would be better to spend a lot of money to recruit a number of alchemists and give them their own laboratory in a secluded corner of Border Town, where they could ponder over the right mixture.

After the dinner, Roland took Anna and Scroll back with him to his office.

Now that Border Town financial situation was like a bulging purse, Roland would soon place more than half of his assets into compulsory education, even if it only yield slow results.

An industrial society needed a base of educated civilians, rather than the brute force of illiterates. Without universal education, the rise in population could only change into a burden for the population.

Taking this in consideration, Roland intended from this day on to take some time each evening to start teaching. Only waiting

until Scroll had a basic understanding of natural science, while at the same time the town had almost completed its first batch of literacy tasks.

Since Scroll would become the future education pioneer and all-round teacher, Roland naturally taught her everything he had learned during his whole life. While Anna was just added in because of his own preference.

Even so, Anna wasn't gifted with an extraordinarily retentive memory, but her desire for knowledge and her self-initiative to learn was the strongest of all witches. He could often see her going through the books in his bookcase, six months down, he was afraid that there weren't any books left that she still hasn't read. In addition, her acceptance of new things and her logical way of thinking was also rare in this era.

Taking the primary mathematics and physics textbook from Scroll, Roland began to talk about today's teaching content.

At the beginning when Roland taught addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, to a slightly more complex equation calculation, Anna's ability to understand was significantly better than Scroll's. But when they changed to physic, Scroll showed that she could remember Roland's prior explanations word for word, and now only needed to slowly understand it. And Anna as well would also raise some questions from time to time.

For example, how elementary particle looked like, why the elementary particle that formed all living things had nothing in common with each other, and so on...

Some of the questions Roland could answer, some of them he couldn't.

For example, in the end what is magic?

He could only tell them his own speculation that he had previously come up with; that magic may be a kind of energy, similar to electrical energy or thermal energy, but which was only accessible by witches. But it couldn't be ruled out that after storing this kind of energy it could be even used by ordinary people.

Hearing this Anna had a thoughtful expression.

While teaching women, especially such outstanding type of women, time would always fly by fast. Unconsciously, the candles had already been replaced twice, and the new ones were also nearing their end.

Suddenly, Roland heard a subtle snore, and when he turned into its direction, he could see Nightingale lying unconscious, asleep on the sofa, perhaps this kind of lesson is just like a lullaby to her? No longer sheltered by her fog, her completely inelegant sleeping posture was exposed to the three of them.

The Prince shook his head dumbfounded, decided it was now time to end the class. He took off his coat and gently covered Nightingale, blowing out the candle and with a smile on his face as he led Anna and Scroll out of the room.

Chapter 130 - Evolution

After the lesson, Anna returned to her own room. She threw a cluster of green flames into a big bucket filled with water, heating the water to a comfortable temperature.

When the water was finally hot enough, she stripped naked and lowered herself into the bucket.

Every witch that wanted to clean their body would first come to Anna to ask for her help with heating the water. After all, getting hot water from the kitchen up to their rooms was a very troublesome procedure. When His Royal Highness got to know of this arrangement he was quite surprised; it seemed it was difficult for him to accept that they would repeatedly use the same water.

Remembering the expression he made back then, Anna still had to let out a laugh. For the civilian population, it was already very hard to clean their bodies for even once a month, and even then, they would still use the same water several times.

It seems he hadn't even noticed how much our lives have already improved since he accepted us witches and gave us a new home to live in. Anna shook her head, His Royal Highness, Roland Wimbledon seems to be well learned in many areas, but in other areas, he is just... clumsy. From the stories she had read in her books, shouldn't a prince have participated in every kind of banquet, social activity, and walked through a sea of flowers since his childhood? As a prince, he is allowed to be without learning or skills and can be cowardly and timid before a fight, but at least he should be good at his communication.

However, this kind of thought unexpectedly made her feel at ease.

His head seems to be filled with a lot of wondrous knowledge, such as the creation and usage of machines powered by steam, and how to calculate the right size of stone that is able to float on water. There was also today's course, where he taught us that the world was actually composed of numerous tiny balls which are all so small that you would need to magnify them thousands of times before you could see them with the naked eye. Because they are all so small, they are everywhere, whether it is a solid material, gas, liquid, people, flowers, or stones, when decomposed to their smallest state they are all made out of the same material.

That's just incredible, Anna thought, how can it be that His Royal Highness knows of these things?

Instead of wiping her body dry, she just used her own flame to vaporize the water droplets on her body. She then put on her clothes and took a place at her desk.

In the middle of the table there laid a textbook that was written by Roland.

Taking advantage of Scroll's ability to create illusions of books for a period of time, Anna had borrowed a copy of his textbook every night so that she could read a little before she went to bed.

Within it was all kinds of information, it began with the simplest

phenomena in life, like a step by step instructional on how to strip an onion, which was in some places even accompanied by some lively and interesting pictures, to the unheard of novelty knowledge at the later parts in the book. So, the moment Anna opened it and read the first page it was nearly impossible for her to stop.

But in front of the content is also more obvious, the further she came to the end of the book the harder it was for her to understand. For example, in one section he had written that even the temperature of objects, in other words whether they were cold or hot was decided by the activity of these small balls he had talked about today. The higher their energy became, the more actively the balls would become and the more heat they would release. If what His Royal Highness had written was right, then it means that my own green flame gets amplified by the motion of these small balls?

Over the time the candles were gradually burned down, then reaching their end, the flame just shook twice before they went out. At the same moment the illusion of the book also reached its time limit, the pages and the writing gradually turned transparent, until they disappeared without a trace.

Suddenly the whole room was engulfed in darkness before a green flame came to life on top of Anna's fingertips, dispersing the surrounding night.

Seeing the empty desktop, a feeling of loss emerged within Anna's heart.

She raised her right hand, looking at her magical green flame, which stood motionless at the top of her fingertips.

Suddenly she felt the urge to try it out, testing whether everything really was formed out of these small balls, if that was the case then could her fire get the same characteristics as those small balls? She closed her eyes, trying to form an image how her flame would look like if it was created by the accumulation of countless small particles.

Slowly the flame in her hand began to change.

It changed from its water-droplet like form into a string, becoming thinner and thinner but at the same time longer and longer until it looked like a long hair.

Anna could feel these changes, but it was still far from enough, she thought, comparing a hair to these balls, it was still much too large. I can still make it finer.

Even though her mind wanted it, it seemed incredibly hard to change the green flame any further, the light of her flame became dim, like a shivering long and slender light ray.

Perhaps not as a cluster, but instead a series of connections... His Royal Highness had said that between the balls that there is a fixed distance between them, perhaps I have to reshape its shape.

The flame in Anna's mind fluttered and she could hear a sound

like something becoming broken apart. Afterward the flame particles were no longer closely linked but instead were scattered like the stars. The slender green flame on her hand had also disappeared, but in her consciousness, the flame still existed, but it had no longer its initial appearance – in the boundless darkness, most of the stars had perished, the rest of them slowly reunited, one by one they formed a row of swath, until a filament of many stars was formed.

The temperature is equal to activity, she thought.

The moment she formed this thought, the line began to swing, like someone had pinched into a corner of it, it began to gently flicker. The moment it began to swing, the swinging of filament could no longer be stopped, one ripple followed after another.

It seemed as if she was within a world of ripples, there were no longer any clear outlines between objects, around her everything was excitedly rippling and there was no end in sight. The same could be said about magic, she could even feel it. When she extended her finger, pulling at one of the ripples, it was just like her own magic.

But when she opened her eyes, everything was calm. Her green flame had disappeared, and she needed a while until her eyes could adapt to the dark room, the desk, wardrobe, candlestick... their shapes emerged one after another out the shadow. Light blue moonlight fell through the window on the floor, giving everything a light grayish color. Everything seemed to be the same as always, there was no change.

But in her eyes, the world has become completely different. A black filament appeared in the air in front of her. However, Anna naturally knew that she couldn't really "see" it, that it was only in her own perception.

She took one of the ingots she had always trained with and which laid still on her desk and placed it in front of herself.

The black filament wrapped itself around the ingot in accordance with her will, she then quickly pulled it together. Like a hot knife cutting through butter her filament went through the iron ingot with ease. In Anna's comprehension, the temperature produced by the filament was several times higher than that of her green flame but was limited to a very narrow range. The iron ingot was quickly cut into two parts, and when she took one of it into her hands she saw that the cutline was very smooth, and she could only feel a little heat when placed her finger against the cutline.

She then erected the iron ingot on her desk, placed her black filament on top of the ingot, and let it spread out until it was a completely flat string, perpendicular to each other.

This was the mathematical knowledge taught by His Highness, using a point as the center, and then use a quill connected to a string and then go one time around the center, they will be able to draw a precise circle. The area of the circle is equal to the length of the string multiplied by itself and multiplied by a fixed constant.

Anna controlled her horizontally spread filament and bended it downwards at the ends at a right angle, letting it penetrate through the ingot until it reached the top of the desk. And then she

let it gently rotate around the point at the center – compared with her green flame where she could only adjust the temperature and whole body, the black flame composed of many particles could be turned into any shape and the temperature of each part could be controlled separately.

After one revolution, she had cut out the form of a cylinder.

Because the cutting line was so small, Anna needed to use a great effort to get the cylinder out. Like before where she had cut the ingot in two, the entire wall of the cut-out cylinder was also very smooth. In the moonlight, she could even see the reflection of her own face in it.

Chapter 131 - The Manifestation Of Magic

Early at dawn of the next morning, Roland was woken up by Nightingale, who had stolen his blanket. He remembered that the last time he was woken up this way was when Nana's father had discovered that his daughter had become a witch.

So, he sleepily asked while rubbing his eyes, "What's going on? Did we discover a new witch in town?"

"No, Your Highness," Nightingale was totally excited, "Anna... her ability has changed!"

Roland, who at this point wasn't completely awake yet asked, "Wasn't she already a grown-up?"

"Our ability can change even after we become an adult, but until now I have never seen such an amazing kind of magic. It's just like a completely different entity." Nightingale went to the washbasin, "Even Scroll and Wendy have never heard of something like this, make haste, you have to see it; the others are already waiting for you in the office!"

Roland casually washed his face, threw some clothes on and went with Nightingale to the second floor and into his office. When he stepped into the room, the eyes of eleven witches immediately focused on him. One of them was Anna, whose eyes were completely swollen, giving the impression that she hadn't gotten any sleep last night.

“Who can tell me what happened?”

The first one who opened her mouth to speak was Nightingale, “Early this morning I passed by Anna’s room and saw her laying her head on the table and sleeping. On the table were also a pile of iron lumps. When I approached her to wake her up I discovered that the magic within her body had turned into...” She paused for a moment, seemingly having to think about a way to describe it, “it fused into a fixed shape, like a constantly rotating cube.”

Roland went to Anna and stopped directly in front of her. There, he carefully examined her all over, but other than seeing that she was clearly tired, he couldn’t detect any differences. Then, he noticed the lengthy cylinder standing on the table; it seemed to be made out of iron, but its gray surface was very smooth and the top was also cleanly cut off, dazzling Roland’s eyes. “This is...”

“This was created by Anna,” explained Nightingale, “She made it with her new ability. When a witch awakens to her power, her body will begin to gather magic. At the beginning, the gathered magic looks like a cluster of fog. However, after a few years, it will turn into a colorful whirlpool. For example, Wendy’s magic is white while Leaves’ magic is green... Previously Anna’s magic reservoir was already very large and condensed into a dark green whirlpool on her day of adulthood, but now, the magic within her body has become fist-sized, solid and completely opaque.” She picked up the quill on his desk and began to draw its outline, “It’s almost like that.”

Although Nightingale’s painting skills were very rudimentary, Roland could still distinguish that it had the form of a cube.

Roland turned in Anna's direction. "What happened last night?"

Hearing this question, Anna began to recount everything from last night. When she finished her story, the other witches were wearing a confused expression on their faces. They were totally unable to understand what these things that were coming out of her mouth, like small balls, vibrations, and connections had to do with the change to her ability.

Only Roland's heart had begun to beat faster.

In his opinion, magic was a kind of energy, and the witches were its outlets. Magic could endlessly be transformed into different kinds of abilities, and in the end, the witch herself would decide what kind of effect her magic had. It always depended on how the witch manipulated it, or more precisely, it depended on the witch's own imagination.

If his guess was right, imagination could have a far-reaching impact on the developing of their abilities.

In short, for a person who had never seen an airplane, it would be difficult to think of the idea that a huge iron bird could fly in the air; a person who had never seen the universe naturally didn't know how wide the world was. The height of their own imagination and the breadth of their knowledge limited their use of magic. Each further understanding of the nature of the world had brought great advances in science and technology, so why wouldn't that also be true for the witches' abilities? The deeper

their understanding of the world became, the closer their magic and their effect would come to the origin.

“Let me see your new abilities,” Roland asked, full of curiosity.

Anna spread out her arm, and on top of her fingers a black flame appeared out of the thin air. Even when taking a closer look, there was still no difference between the appearance of her flame and that of an ordinary flame, with the exception that it was black and didn’t create any light.

So, Roland asked further, “Can you change the shape of your black flame?”

Anna nodded, and under her control her flame moved down to the top of the desk. Then her naturally-shaped black flame turned into a cube. Not giving anyone the chance to react, the block began to spread out and turned into a black sheet-like cloth, covering almost the entire desk, then gathered at the center, gradually changing into a thin, upright line. Roland could not help but touch, only to discover that this long and slender object, resembling a hair, didn’t move a single jot. This was simply inconceivable. It seemed to be as hard as steel, but moments later he could easily bend it with his fingers. She could decide if it was flexible or absolutely rigid; a true body didn’t exist.

“Can you make it even thinner?”

“Yes, but then you cannot touch it anymore,” said Anna, “or else it will easily cut into your hand.”

“But you can still freely control its temperature?”

“Right, and compared to my previous green fire, I can now control it to such a degree that different parts of my flame can have different temperatures.”

Roland could now somewhat understand what Nightingale meant by completely new ability. Compared to her former green and warm fire, her ability at the moment had become completely different; describing it as flame like before wouldn't be appropriate. When Anna accepted the idea that the universe was built out of microscopic particles, her control of the temperature had also achieved a completely new stage after connecting it with particle motion. It was certain that Anna wasn't manipulating the particles the same way she had manipulated the flames before.... No matter if it was her original flame, her green flame she got on her day of adulthood, or now her black flame, they were her form of expressing her magic.

Although she converted her magic into heat in both methods, the true effect was very different.

She is truly a genius, Roland couldn't stop himself from sighing, anything else than genius, he could not think of a more appropriate adjective. In the same evening of learning new knowledge, she was immediately able to fully comprehend it and apply it to create a new ability. Only very talented people could have this absorptive capacity and way of thinking.

Anna's changes also made him more interested in exploring the true nature of the world.

Unfortunately, I don't have my own magic, Roland thought, this is definitely my biggest regret after crossing over. After all, within the hearts of most people there is the dream of becoming a superhero, accidentally gaining an incredible power, and walking down a unique path. How much fun would that be?

"I might know why Anna's ability has changed," Roland spoke aloud, pushing back his regrets and coming back to reality.

"How has she achieved it?" The crowd asked.

"Through studying."

"Do you mean something like yesterday's teaching class?" Scroll unsurely muttered.

"That is exactly what I was talking about," Roland began to explain his own speculation again, "The understanding of the world can help you improve your ability, or even completely change it."

"I can... also change?" Mystery Moon timidly asked.

"Of course," Roland reassuringly patted her shoulder. If there wasn't a limited number of steam engines, and I hadn't found the rubber, I would have been unable to produce wires, so her ability

to create strong magnets would have become very handy.

The original purpose behind his action of imparting his knowledge to Scroll was to avoid forgetting what he had learned in his ordinary memory. But now, he had accidentally discovered that knowledge played a big role in forming the effect of the witches' abilities. So, it became necessary that all the witches partake in his evening lessons.

Of course, he also understood, that not everyone had Anna's outstanding talent. For example, he didn't have the tiniest piece of hope for Nightingale, who always fell asleep during his lessons. He didn't know how many of the witches would cross the difficult path of simply remembering something to completely understanding it, then understanding it to actually using it.

"Last night you didn't get any sleep, so it would be the best if you got some rest now," Roland said to Anna, "I'll take another look at your new ability in two days."

"Alright," Anna nodded earnestly.

"As for the rest of you," he looked to the other witches, "from today on, you will all come together in the living room after dinner to start with the basics and learn how to read and write on Mondays to Fridays. Scroll will be your teacher."

Chapter 132 - The Knight Of The Elk Family

(Part 1)

Prius had already been locked up for five days.

Although it couldn't be called a cell, after the transformation, there was not much difference between the former house and a cell – the original wooden doors were replaced by wooden railings, all the furniture had been removed from the house, and only a few blankets were left. The only advantage compared to a cell was that the room was clear and that it had neither holes for draught nor rain.

In addition to Prius, there were four other prisoners. Three of them belonged to the house of the former Duke, the other belonged to the Wolf Family, and Prius himself belonged to the Elk Family.

“What the hell, he really wants to lock us up in here!” Shouted one of the Duke’s Knights, who belonged to the oldest people who have taken part in the battle, “The wheat on the fields in my territory haven’t even been sown yet! And my woman doesn’t know how to manage everything.”

“Your territory?” asked the young knight of the Wolf Family with a lot of contempt in his voice, “Do you really believe that the Prince will let you keep your rank as a knight? Even letting you keep your Horse, Armor, and weapons so that you can start your revenge whenever you feel like? Really, as long as he doesn’t send us to the gallows, he can still be considered as a kind person.”

“What did you just say!?” The old knight stared furiously at him.

“To tell you the truth,” the young knight explained further, “The Duke did indeed plan to start a rebellion against the throne in doing so becoming a first-rate convict, taking all of his elite knights with him, and only letting a few stand by the side of his son. As for us, we would naturally be forced by the Duke to follow him onto the battlefield.”

“I see that you would really like to die now!” Hearing him talk like this the old knight suddenly went over, picking the young knight and lifting him up, while at the same time clenching his right hand into a fist, already going through the motion to hit him, but suddenly his hand was firmly grasped from behind.

“Stay your hand, Halon. Do you want that the guards come over?” the fist was grasped by a young handsome knight, “What he said is right, we were knights under the command of the Duke, so if we are to be convicted we are likely to be sentenced to a heavy punishment. Just look at the Knight of the Elk Family, he is waiting calmly for the result, and now look at how you are acting. Do you think you’re showing the right kind of demeanor?

Prius could immediately recognize this man, he was the star of all of the Longsong Stronghold’s knights, Ferlin Eltek, also nicknamed Morning Light. He had captured the hearts of many aristocratic families’ young ladies. However, after coming around, he finally settled down and married a civilian, creating a lot of heated discussions. After being mentioned, Prius decided that now wasn’t the time to stay quiet, so he said to them: “I don’t know

what will happen to your territories, but I'm certain that the Prince won't kill us."

"Oh, why's that?"

"If he had killed us all in the stronghold, he would have achieved a deterrent effect, but after spending so much effort to bring us to Border Town, why should he kill us here? To impress the civilians?" Prius shook his head, "During the battle, we weren't even able to set one foot inside the town."

As long no one attacked them, burning down and looting their houses, the town's people naturally wouldn't have any extreme hatred against them. Therefore, since the Prince didn't kill them during their stay in the stronghold, he also wasn't likely to kill them here in Border Town.

After thinking about this for a moment, the knight called Eltek nodded in confirmation, "What you said makes sense. May I have your name, please, mister...?"

"Prius Dessau."

"Thank you for your encouraging words, Sir Dessau." After he expressed his thanks, Ferlin grasped Halon by his arm and took him back to another corner.

The young knight of the Wolf Family also sat back down, and leaning against the wall and began to hum.

He really doesn't seem to be afraid of it, Prius thought, but my staying "calm", isn't anything other than a facade.

Prius knew that he wasn't made out of the things needed to be a knight. He did not inherit his father's bravery, nor his mother's wisdom, and instead of training with the sword he had always preferred to take care of their territory. Raising chicken and ducks, fishing in the pond or doing anything else similar to this. As a knight for the Elk Family, he was really a helpless case, not to mention killing someone, he didn't even like to participate in hunting. So, during their charges against the defenders of Border Town, Prius had always kept as far to the back as possible, never expecting to come into a situation where he had to retreat for his life.

Hold on... when he thought about the battle he got the feeling that there was something wrong, as the star of the Duke's Knight, why was Eltek still able to stay alive? Shouldn't he have been the first line in leading the charge?

"His Royal Highness wants to see you," a guard suddenly shouted by the door, "Sirius Daly, you're the first to come with me."

Hearing his name a young knight jumped up, waved once to say goodbye to the others and left the cell.

"Hey, we also want to go!"

Seeing that one of them was allowed to leave Halon also chased to

the door, only to be stopped by the blunt end of the guard's weapon. After locking the door, he turned once more into the direction of the prisoner and coldly said, "Do not worry, it won't be long before it will be your turn."

Knowing that it was soon time for his own trial, with each passing minute Prius became more and more tense.

Damn it, previously the day of the trial couldn't come along fast enough for me, but now that the day has finally arrived, I've become afraid. Prius thought angrily. But he couldn't stop his body from shaking from time to time. Every few moments he would look towards the door, feeling the same as if his first child was soon to be born, feeling hope and panic at the same time.

Fortunately, the waiting time wasn't all that long, probably only half an hour had passed before the guard responsible for escorting the prisoners came again, "Prius Dessau, it's your turn."

Panic-stricken he jumped up, but his feet accidentally tripping about one of the blankets laying on the floor, but Eltek seeing that just took a step forward and supported him, stopping him from falling down.

"Th-thank you." Prius pressed the words out of his parched throat.

"It's nothing much." Said his helper with a soothing voice, taking away a lot of Prius' tension.

He nodded once more thankfully in Ferlin's direction and then followed the guard out of the cell.

Leading the way was a young man, who was about seventeen years old, was wearing a dark brown leather armor and boots while holding a strange weapon in his hands.

“Don’t you need to tie my hands together?” Prius asked confused.

“When we locked you up you were already searched thoroughly, so what can you even do without a weapon?”

“Where are you going to take me?”

“To His Highness’s Castle.”

“What’s happened to the previous man? The knight, how is he?”

The guard just shrugged his shoulders and didn’t give him an answer.

Well, maybe he doesn’t know what happened to him, or it is also possible that he just doesn’t want to tell me. When it became clear that he wouldn’t get another answer, Prius just closed his mouth.

Prius had a very strange feeling as he looked at his escort. The guard dressed and looked like an ordinary civilian, but when he just spoke to the knights he didn’t show even a trace of fear, he

wasn't even using the most basic form of honorifics. He seems to not understand, that during peacetime, we knights can easily decide his life and death.

But there was also the expression in his eyes – Prius had looked into the eyes of many people who were always fighting to survive, their eyes were all stiff and indifferent, just like the eyes of a soulless corpse, but in this young man's eyes, he saw arrogance and pride. It was obviously that he was a civilian, but he was showing the same prideful demeanor as a full-fledged knight. This extreme incongruity confused Prius to the extreme.

In the end, what kind of environment was needed in order to give birth to such a person?

While walking, Prius viewed his surrounding, although he had never been to Border Town before, he had still heard about what a barren and desolate place it was. But the vibrancy he felt from the town, stood on the complete opposite end of the image he had previously formed of it. Everywhere on the streets there were people coming and going, always moving at a fast pace, giving the impression as if everyone was busy. From time to time, there were other people dressed in the same way as the young man escorting him. Everyone's face was rosy, full of spirit, and not a bit like people who had just experienced the ordeal of the Months of Demons.

Close to the castle district, he saw an area where more than 100 people had gathered together – it seems this group of people were responsible for the construction of residential houses, but looking at the scale it seemed that they were building more than one. The

materials they needed to build the houses were neatly accumulated on the side and within them, there were also plenty of fired bricks.

In general, only the aristocracy would choose to use this more expensive material, but assuming that the building was supposed for a noble, the area built was just too small for nobility. Looking at an already previously built house, he discovered that it was only as large as his family's drawing room. In addition, all those houses were built with the same design, which aristocracy would like such houses?

With his head filled with questions, Prius entered the Lord's Castle.

Chapter 133 - The Knight Of The Elk Family

(Part 2)

Before he was allowed to enter the parlor, Prius had to once more go through a complete body search. But this time it was a much more detailed search than the previous one. From the top to the bottom, they had touched every possible place in which he could hide a knife, even his soles weren't forgotten.

He was then led into the hall and was finally able to see the person responsible for the Duke's defeat – the 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle, the Lord of Border Town, as well as the new Lord of the Western Territories, Roland Wimbledon.

The Prince carried the typical symbol of the Wimbledon bloodline, the gray hair. His face still looked very young, at most he was still in his early twenties. Besides his gray hair, there wasn't any other sign of his royal blood. He didn't wear a crown nor did he have any other kind of jewelry on his slender fingers, instead he was holding a quill in his hand. Furthermore, he didn't wear any bracelets either – all of this was a very rare sight when facing a member of the aristocracy.

"Are you Prius Dessau, a knight belonging to the Elk Family?" Roland asked while he leaned back into his chair and looked at the parchment.

"Yes, Sir," When spoken to, Prius knelt down on one knee.

He couldn't believe it, such a young man without even the trace

of a beard, was able to lead a group of miners and hunters to defeat the whole combined forces of the previous Lord of the Western Territories, Duke Ryan.

“Are you able to read and write? You may stand up and answer.”

“I can, Your Highness, this is a knight’s most basic of requirement,” Prius stood up and suddenly thought of some of the old Knight who got their title conferred during the time where the Kingdom of Graycastle wasn’t as powerful, they even knighted civilians with good military achievements, so he quickly added, “I mean, like all other knights of the younger generation are able to.”

Over the past three decades, with the reduction in exploration and wars, the possibility of achieving military merits and getting canonized had become smaller while at the same time other traits became more important for a knight. If you didn’t pick up the pen and wasn’t able to read or write a document, it would become very difficult to rule over your own territory. With the king’s establishment of the camp in the Cold Wind Ridge, the area at the western border of the Kingdom of Dawn had a sudden rise in the number of talented men appearing there. But at the same time, the requirements for being knighted was also placed at a new height.

So now during the training to become a knight, the first thing trainees would learn was how to read and write, while later on, if they wanted to rise higher in rank, they would also have to master a variety of etiquettes.

But Prius couldn’t understand, why had His Royal Highness asked him this question?

“Very well,” the Prince nodded. “Then it’s time for my judgment.”

Hearing this sentence, Prius instantly held his breath.

“There are two options you can pick from, one is to go to the North Slope Mine and mine there for twenty years to redeem your sins while your second option is to become a teacher and start to teach my people how to read and write. Furthermore, as a miner you won’t be treated as a slave, you will be paid and every month you will have three days of rest. But teachers are not only paid, they will get free housing and two days rest each week. However, if you choose the latter option, you must work until you reach the age of fifty, only then will you be allowed to lay down your post. By that time though, even if you don’t continue working any longer, you will still be paid as usual.”

After listening to all this Prius was a little relieved, sure enough, just like he had expected, they don’t have to face death or exile. But these two options still left him very puzzled, it sounds like the job as a miner requires a lot of hard work, but His Royal Highness had also said that they would get a salary and... holidays?

And, as a teacher wasn’t it important to be a knowledgeable person? But besides reading and writing, I have no further knowledge. And what meaning did it have to teach civilians anything? His Royal Highness could not truly believe that he could teach the civilians the complete aristocracy culture, could he?

But the most critical point was that both options didn't mention what would happen to his own territory.

So, Prius gathered his courage, looked up at the Prince, and carefully asked: "Your respected Highness, I do not know what will happen to my territory when I chose one of the two..."

"From the moment you raised the sword against me, your territory no longer belonged to you," answered Roland bluntly. "On this point, I have already reached an agreement with the heir of the Elk family, that after you made your choice, the new count will send a compensation together with your family to Border Town, so that your territory is vacant and he can confer the knight's title on someone else."

Prius' heart sank, but that is my territory, my house it also on my territory, and there also a group of chickens and ducks and a pond full of fishes, how much can these things be worth? The new count would certainly use a sharp knife to cut it down as far as possible... It was hard to say whether he would even get thirty gold royals for it. The Count has just died, and his heir had already abandoned his own family, such ruthlessness deeply disappointed Prius.

"As an accomplice of the traitor, who rebelled against the throne, this is just a minor verdict." Roland paused, "Moreover, why are you even showing such a large regret pity for a barren little territory? Whether you choose to become a miner or a teacher, as long as you save enough money you can purchase your own territory."

Hearing this sentence, Prius spirit raised once more, mining was

certainly not his favorite work, but for the other choice... “Your Royal Highness, may I get to know how high the salary for a teacher is?”

“As a Junior Grade Teacher, you would get a payment of 20 silver royals each month, with an increase of 5 silver royals per year, until you reach the age of 50. After reaching the age of fifty, your salary will be the same like your highest previous salary, however, your job as a teacher cannot be inherited nor can it be transferred.”

With his little arithmetic knowledge, Prius calculated that he would receive a yearly income of nearly 3 gold royals, even more, it would increase yearly. So as long as he was able to work for four to five years his income would be as high as his own territory’s income. “Your Royal Highness, what does the title Junior Grade Teacher mean... are there any other types of teachers?”

“Of course there are also other occupations. The Primary Teachers merely teach the reading and writing of characters, while Middle-Grade Teachers and High-Grade Teachers are responsible for teaching all kinds of different knowledge. As long as it is a unique skill which is able to help with the development of a Border Town you can get the position.” Roland sat himself straight up, “How is it, do you have any other good skills? I’m not asking about riding or fencing skills.”

That doesn’t matter since I’m bad at them anyway, Prius thought. He hesitated, but then he said: “Your Royal Highness, I’m good at raising chicken and ducks. I am also very good at fishing.” The moment he had said it aloud, was the moment he already

regretted his words. What kind of skill was that? If he was thrown into the wild he would be able to survive. Other nobles were also raising cats or birds, but wasn't something which interested Prius very much. As for fishing... this was the same as hunting, it could only be counted as his personal hobby.

But he would have never believed that His Royal Highness would be so interested into his skills, "Oh? How do you raise them, can you please explain it to me."

With no better option than to brace himself and start explaining or to fall, Prius began to state his gathered knowledge.

"Uh, according to my experience in the area of raising broods, it is important to put some grain into the hey, that way they will grow faster. In addition, the grain should be mixed with sand, it will have a similar effect while at the same time, saving on food. It would also be good to set a shed in a well-ventilated area, where they are safe from the sun, rain, and the cold. Especially during the hot summer, if there is no shelter, the hen will most likely stop laying its eggs. While during the winter it's important to give them some straw, to avoid the chickens from freezing to death. In addition, if you feed them some small fish every month, the chickens will rarely get sick, of course, it is also important to clean up the chicken manure regularly..."

When his speech came to its end, he had to discover that His Highness actually had begun to laugh. "Yes, it appears that the aristocracy of the Western Territory truly aren't useless."

"Your Royal Highness?" Prius couldn't understand what the

Prince meant.

Fortunately, Roland Wimbledon quickly lifted his fears, “I will send people to buy a group of chickens and ducks from the Longsong Stronghold, while at the same time I will also give you a piece of land to the west of Border Town, where you can raise the birds. Your payment will be according to that of a Middle-Grade Teacher. For the first year, you will get 50 silver royals each month, with an annual increase of 10 silvers. Of course, if you fail to raise the birds, your only option left will be the mines.”

Chapter 134 - Morning Light

First, Roland recorded Prius future treatment on a paper, and he then put down the quill and rubbed his aching neck.

Moments later Nightingale's voice could be heard from behind, "Your Royal Highness, would you like me to help you relax?"

"There are still more than 30 other prisoners I have to deal with, maybe later." Roland smiled and nodded in disagreement, he instead took the bell which was placed by the side of his table and rung it a few times. The earlier he finished these chores, the sooner he could start with the Border Town General Education task. After seeing Anna's new ability, he was now full of expectation of what the future would hold.

The next person who was brought into the hall by his guards was a tall man and Roland's first impression of him was that he seemed extraordinarily handsome. He wasn't that far off compared to Carter, who had the face of a male god. Of course, in Roland's eyes he immediately got negative points for his handsomeness. After glancing on his list, he asked, "Ferlin Eltek?" But there was something different between him and other people, behind his name there were also additional comments, so Roland read further, "Head of the Knights of the Lions, Morning Light, First Knight in the Western Territory... you have so many titles."

"I do, Your Highness." Ferlin acknowledged, at the same time going down on one knee.

“I thought people like you, the Head of the Lions would be in the first in line during the charge,” Roland raised his brow. “How were you able to survive?”

“I hid within the rows further behind,” admitted the knight, “so long as your control over your horse and its step size is good enough, you can let it look like you are in full sprint, while in fact, you haven’t raised the speed by much.”

Roland had never expected that he would get such a straightforward answer, he thought that the other side would try to find some excuse to cover up their own fear of fighting, hiding the fact that they had escaped. It seems that this matter wasn’t as simple as he had at first thought.

Sure, enough, the knight quickly explained his behavior further: “On the morning of the third day of your pursuit, in other words, at the day of the Duke’s death, I have been standing by his side, trying to find an opportunity to kill him, but he still had a large number of guards by his side, which were tightly surrounding him. So, I did not find the right opportunity to start my assault, but fortunately, your troops were able to kill him in the end,” during the whole time he told his story he had held his head down. “Your His Highness, I express my gratitude for what you did, so regardless of where you will send me, I will give it my best.”

The last sentence could be nearly seen as a plea of allegiance, stunning Roland for a moment, when he had finally collected himself he said: “Stand up and explain it to me further, in the end, what has happened between you and the Duke?”

“As you command, Your Highness. My wife, Irene, was originally a civilian who worked at a well-known theater in the stronghold. We met each other on a lucky encounter and we immediately fell in Love. I had hoped to marry her, but my father and mother did not support the wedding. So, I had to leave the territory, and rent a room on a farm near the stronghold. That was also the place where we had held the wedding. However, shortly after our marriage, Irene finally got the opportunity for her first formal performance.” Speaking up to here, the Knight’s voice became smaller, “The Duke also watched the drama and immediately took a fancy to her, and it didn’t take long before he broke into our room and assaulted Irene while I was still out on a mission.

“It took me a long time before I finally got her to tell me what had really happened, and the moment I heard about it, I wanted to find the Duke and hold him responsible for his deeds, but Irene knelt down and begged me not to act recklessly. Deep down, I also knew that if I tried to do something, my chance of success weren’t very high. Even if I was able to kill him, I would never be able to escape the hands of his personal guards, and Irene... most likely would become the object of revenge for the Duke ‘s heir. With no other option left to me, I could only suppress my thoughts of revenge, until he decided to go on march against Border Town.

“Although I wasn’t able to take personal revenge, but now Irene will finally be able to feel fall asleep without having to worry that someone will break into her room during the night. For me it was also a heavy burden which is now finally lifted from my heart, so please allow me to thank you once again.”

“So that’s what happened.” Roland tapped with his quill on the table, a sign he had previously agreed on with Nightingale, telling

her to check whether the other side had lied. Soon he could feel how Nightingale pinched his left scapula, which represented that the other side had told the truth... but this pinch was slightly too hard, letting Roland a little flinch. “Are you able to read and write?”

“Uh...” Now it was Ferlin’s time to get startled, showing that he clearly was unable to follow the Prince’s train of thoughts, “I can.”

“Then I’ll announce my verdict now,” Roland gave him the same choices that he had given to Prius, “... what is your choice?”

“Your Highness, do you not want me to fight for you? Whether it is a solitary riding duel or a group battle, I -”

“No, I do not,” interrupted Roland him, “there are no aristocrats within my army, and in the future, I won’t be recruiting any of them. They are a fully-armed civilian army, and you yourself, during the rest of your life you won’t ever get the opportunity to again take up a weapon.”

“Yes... so?” Ferlin was silent for a long time before he finally nodded, “I understand, that being the case, I choose to become a teacher.”

“You made a wise choice. Teachers can get free housing and their salary is also very good. I will send someone back to your home, to get your wife, so that you can live continue to live a good life here together.” After giving his judgment, Roland gave the signal that Ferlin could now leave.

“Wait, Your Highness, I beg you please let me ask a favor of you,” Ferlin, however, did not leave. “Did you mean that the other knights, as long as they are unable to become a teacher, the only option left to them is to work in the mines for twenty years?”

“That’s exactly what I said.”

“Your Royal Highness... I have a man named Harlon, he is an experienced and old knight, but he is unable to read. Can I pay for him with gold royals, so that he won’t be sent into the mine?”

“Of course not,” Roland directly disagreed, “if you could redeem your crime with money, you would just go back to the stronghold.”

“But he’s almost fifty years old, and this kind of work where he doesn’t get to see the light of the day would only destroy his body.”

“He isn’t strong enough to mine, but he was still able to attack Border Town? Furthermore, my ore mine isn’t such a dark coal mine as you’re imaging. I also have a steam engine, which helps with the pumping and transportation and the staff even have a fixed holiday, don’t you think that’s good enough? Roland picked up the bell, ready to call for the next prisoner.

“My Lord!” Ferlin got frantic and went once more down on his knee. “My family has a treasure map, which is at least four hundred years old and I am willing to use that to buy his freedom.”

“A treasure map with an age of more than four hundred years...” The Prince became uncertain, “Are you sure that it wasn’t one of your ancestors who took some charcoal and casually drew a map to coax the younger generation?

“No, it’s not written with charcoal or ink,” the knight shook his head. Then he placed his hand on head as if was trying to recall the drawing. “I can’t tell you out of what material it is made of. The lines are very delicate, smooth and supple, and it’s been stored in our basements for decades, but the drawings and the text don’t have any signs of discoloration. My father told me that it was handed down from generation to generation and it describes the location of a treasure. It should be hidden deep in the Northwest of the Concealing Forest, but to get there you would have to cross past the Desolate Lands, so to us it was simply impossible to go there.

Roland tapped his quill once more against the table, and once more Nightingale pinched his left side.

“Well, even in the case that what you said was the truth, there is still the problem that this treasure map should be hidden in the basement of your family home. You have already given up the right of your inheritance, and I’m afraid they won’t willingly see you ever again.”

“What you say is the truth,” he firmly nodded, “But I have completely memorized the content of the drawings, the above patterns and the text I can roughly depict it”.

“Then draw it for me,” Roland pushed his quill and paper over

the table into his direction. “If what you said is true, I can make an exception to your request.”

“His Royal Highness is too kind.” Ferlin went to the table and began to depict the treasure map.

It was true, Morning Light wasn’t only good at fighting; no, he was also talented in painting and calligraphy. Soon, a rough topographical map appeared in front of Roland.

The map actually showed the area behind the Impassable Mountain Range, the lower right corner of the map was occupied by mountains. Then around the center, he drew an equilateral triangle, and the three corners pointed to different places. One corner ended at the foot of the Northern Slope, and another corner pointed to a hexagonal star mark inside the Concealing Forest, which was most probably the so-called treasure’s location.

However, Roland’s attention was entirely attracted to the third vertex of the triangle, pointing to the middle of the Wild Lands, on top of a sawtooth-shaped mountain top, stood the word: “Taqila.”

Chapter 135 - To Start With The Basics

– “The Devils grow in number each day, but we become less.”

“The Holy City of Taqila has already fallen into the hands of the enemies, the only option left to us is to scatter in all directions.”

“We fled over mountains and across rivers, as far as possible from the Gates of Hell.”

“But next time, where should we flee?” –

“What do you think about it?” Back in his office, Roland closed the illusion of the ancient book and turned to Scroll to get her opinion of it.

“”In the case that what the Knight remembered was the truth,, this would really be an incredible coincidence.” Scroll pondered for a moment about her next words, “The content of the treasure map and what’s recorded in the ancient book is the same, so this proves that the Church had once stepped into the Wild Lands and constructed a point of resistance against the Devils there. In addition, the points marked on the map are perhaps the defense towers, posts, warehouses, or whatever they built there.”

“You mean... this isn’t really a treasure map?”

“Of course. After all, the Church isn’t a group of bandits or pirates; they do not need to hide their treasures, but they would

leave behind a drawing to help the future generations.”

Roland nodded, “Well, so... this is just such a map?”

“Although it is not clear why the Church did not record this period in history, I believe that the ruins buried in the eastern forest aren’t the only one of its kind.” Analyzed Scroll, “If the locations marked on the map are just some facilities, the chance that we find something after all these centuries aren’t that high, but if it has a storage warehouse in the basement, it will probably be another underground site, and we might be able to uncover some clues from it.”

“What kind of clues?”

“Like the reason that the Church is concealing the existence of the devils? Why do they resist the devil, but still carefully conceal it?” She paused, her voice becoming a little unsteady, ” and... why do they call us witches the Devil’s messengers and why do they want to kill us?”

Roland did not know how to comfort her, so he was unable to find the right words as he fell silent after a moment. Only after a while he slowly began, “Unfortunately he didn’t know how accurate the picture was. According to his statement, the original map wasn’t drawn by hand.”

“Do you want Nightingale to go to the knight’s house?”

“That doesn’t sound right,” Roland denied, “The treasure map has already been passed on for hundreds of years, so the possibility that the storeroom is filled with God’s Stones of Retaliation or other traps is high.” Pointing at the triangle symbol, “For now, this place is out of reach, in any case. If this is the area of our North Slope mine, then the location of the hexagonal star is at least 50 kilometers away from us, almost as far as the distance between Border Town to Longsong Stronghold. With the exception of Lightning, who can travel that distance within a day, the rest of us would need to walk for two to three days. What will we do if we were to meet some of the Devils during the journey... I don’t want you to have any kind of mishap.”

“You can let Lightning explore the forest from the air; maybe she will be able to find something,” Scroll suggested.

“That is a viable option.” Roland immediately stood up, “The next time she comes back I will give her her new mission, but for now I want to go to the North Slope Mine while you get ready to give your next lesson. If you need more copies of the books, you should find Soraya, she will handle it for you. Don’t forget to continue to give them lessons this evening.”

Now that Roland had already held the first lessons of his new primary course, he could give the teachers position to Scroll. With her phonetic reading and writing and her ability to repeat everything from memory she had once heard or read, Roland believed she had everything that was needed to become a good teacher.

“Yes, Your Highness,” Scroll said as she saluted and left.

The testing and production area near the North Slope Mine was now more than two-times as large as it was before, and the two holes needed for the production of the twelve-pound cannon were still left on the ground. When Roland arrived in the testing area, he immediately saw Anna practicing her new ability. On the table next to her, there laid two finished products that looked exactly like steel pipes.

He immediately held them up to take a closer look; the steel pipes were perfectly round and had a totally smooth surface without any pores, the hole in the middle was equally wide on both sides, and the sunlight passed through without any problems through the hole in the pipe. To compare the thickness of the pipe-walls, Roland placed his fingers into the holes. This way, he discovered that they were exactly the same size.

Roland couldn't stop admiring her work, "How were you able to make this?

"Take a look," Anna picked up a freshly cut steel bar, laid it flat on her hand, and inserted a thread of her black flame into one end, leading it through the complete body. Then she let the thread rotate around the center of a circle, and soon the hole was complete.

What an amazing ability, he thought, with her magic, she is capable of hot wire cutting, and at the same time her accuracy and control are incomparable. Anna alone is enough to push the industrial production to a new height inside Border Town. Trying to restrain his excitement, he said, "Let's do some basic tests first."

The basic test included the testing of the scope of her abilities, her ability's strength, and its duration.

Nightingale also took part in the test; she appeared out of her fog and was responsible for observing if there were any changes to the magic inside of Anna's body.

The results showed that in addition to a substantial increase in the strength of her ability and the duration at which she was able to cast her magic, the range at which she was able to use her flame was still around five meters, and it was only within a range of three meters that she was able to carry out her precise control.

Furthermore, her magic still belonged to the category of summoning, and could still be suppressed by God's Stone of Retaliation. When Anna ordered her black flame to enter the range of the stone, the flame would still suddenly disappear.

Unless she could evolve to the point of directly accessing her magic, she wouldn't be able to get past this hurdle.

However, Anna's new capabilities still belonged to the category of earth-changing. With her black flame, it became much easier to produce the industrial machinery, and her ability to reproduce all kinds of tools could be considered as the method to push the level of machine processing to a whole new level.

However, a large-scale industrial production wasn't something that one person could do on their own. For example, Karl had

already finished one of the furnaces he had to build on the hillside near the North Slope Mine. However, by the time they tested it, they discovered that although they could use it to produce clay bricks for the creation of cement, its temperature tolerance was not up to the level that they had needed. So, in the end, they still had to rely on Anna alone to produce the required cement – fortunately, since her day of adulthood, it was no longer required of her to step inside the dusty room to complete the calcining process.

It wasn't the case that Roland was unable to find a solution to the temperature problem. For example, they could use the steam engine to create enough wind in order to improve the furnace's temperature, and they could then let the heated up air circulate to minimize the heat loss. But without Anna, they were unable to create another steam engine. After all, only she could complete the welding of the key components.

It could be said that the creation of industrial machinery was built on the Anna's shoulders. The moment they lost her, the so-called industrial revolution would be nothing more than flowers in a mirror and the moon reflected in the lake.

During the Months of the Demons, Roland had done everything he could in order to survive, and now that the threat of the demonic beasts no longer existed and Longsong Stronghold had provided them with enough additional population and capital, he naturally wanted to change the present situation.

– “First, let us start with the basics.”

He let Anna cut out a two-finger wide and one millimeter-thick steel sheet. He then measured a centimeter-long distance on it, and repeated this until he had a ten-centimeter-long ruler. Then he let Anna's black flame climb up the steel sheet, and create vertical marks at a regular distance. Under her fine control, the distance between each vertical mark was almost exactly the same.

Roland's intention was that this ruler was only the start. Afterwards, he wanted to create various kinds of measuring tools to define the samples for uniform weights and measures. These standard units would then be written as the norm into manuals, becoming an inseparable part of his educational courses.

Chapter 136 - The Dilemma

The last two weeks in Clearwater Port seemed to be one day of festival after another, even standing above the ground, on the balcony of the Lord's Tower, Ryan could still feel the exuberant atmosphere within the city.

The people and materials they had moved from Eagle City had greatly expanded the strength of the harbor city, the looters had really a fruitful harvest and the slavers haven't been any less successful. After this series of fighting, the Black Sail Fleet not only did not have many losses, they could even increase the ranks of the sailors with new slaves who were currently standing at the edge of the harbor undergoing a rigid drill. In a few days, they would set sails towards the Islands of the Fjords beginning this year's first looting operation.

Her Majesty the Queen has also openly declared the Slave Act, as long as these captured slaves from Eagle City were able to capture new slaves, they could exchange them for their replacement. Like this, they could jump from the rank of a slave to a full citizen of the Clearwater Port. With such a decree of encouragement, they could guarantee that the former residents of Eagle City, who had now become slaves, would do their best to fight for her Majesty.

Today, the defeated Timothy should have returned to King's City and shouldn't have any possibility to block the conquest of the Queen of Clearwater. As long as time passes, Garcia Wimbledon was bound to become the Queen of Graycastle. Thinking of this, Ryan couldn't understand why he didn't see even a small trace of happiness on the Queen's face, but to the contrary, her eyebrows were always forming a frown.

“Your Majesty, the Clan Heads of the Sandstone Clan and Black Bone Clan have come to see you.” At this moment, the voice of a guard could be heard through the door.

Ryan looked at Her Majesty, only to see that the latter didn’t show any sign of listening, so he could only shout, “Bring them in.”

His Majesty, whether it was to rest, to convene a meeting or just to meet with people, she was always at the top of the tower. As long as the weather was good, the terrace was the place where Garcia’s could be found. Most people weren’t conformable with standing in mid-air, facing the slightly fishy smelling sea breeze. And the people from the Extreme South were no exception to this.

The Clan Head of the Sandstone Clan was a petite woman, but she also acted as the clan’s own goddess. When Ryan had heard of this for the first time, he had scoffed within his heart, what Goddess? She is nothing more than a corrupted witch. The Clan Head of the Black Bone Clan was a tall man, whose face was covered in scars and whose arms and legs were exceptional muscular. Each meeting, they had to place three to four guards to surround him, in case he planned to act against Her Majesty the Queen.

The moment they set foot on the terrace, the two Clan Heads invariably raised their eyebrows, but they soon changed their expressions back, and instead they went down on one knee to pay their respect to Her Majesty. “May there always be an oasis in front of you, and may the stars of heaven always light your path.”

“Stand up,” Garcia said while she herself sat down on the parapet. “How is it, are you satisfied with your new home?”

“Everything is fine,” answered Goddess Kaaba rushed. “Here the land has water and forests, which is much more comfortable than the life in Sand City, where the wind blows the sand all over the place.”

“When everything is to your liking, then why did you come to me?”

“Your Majesty, you have to”

The moment the Black Bone Clan Head opened his mouth to speak he got already interrupted by Kaaba, “Yes, your Majesty. After the last battle, many of our warriors became weak and dispirited, only after a new dose of pills did their symptoms get any better, but we don’t have enough pills in our hands. So, we would like to ask you if you could give us more pills.”

“I meant to say the same thing” muffled the Black Bone Clan Head after he received a glare from Kaaba.

“These pills are very complicated to produce and have rare ingredients, I do not have much surplus. But rest assured, when the new batch of pills is produced, I will give them to you as soon as possible. But don’t forget to prepare the gold royals, if they aren’t enough, you’ll have to pay in other ways.”

“Your majesty, I beg your pardon for my asking,” Kaaba hesitated for a moment. “I wonder when the next batch will be made.”

“I’m unable to give you this information,” Garcia stroke through her hair, sorting the chaos created by the sea breeze, “All the news about the pills are top secret, you can only go back and wait patiently. Those soldiers are just dispirited, just let them rest a little bit more, then everything will be alright.”

After receiving a hint from Garcia, her guards walked forward to surround the Clan Heads and lead both of them back down, without giving them any chance to say a few anymore words.

When the door closed behind them, Garcia sighed softly.

Ryan who had rarely heard such a tone from the Queen had to ask: “Your Majesty, don’t you think that it was wrong to let the Sandpeople settle down at our southern border? One day, when they become stronger...”

“No, Ryan,” Garcia shook her head, “I have never been worried about the Sandpeople, they won’t ever be a threat to Clearwater Port. The lake in their territory is exactly in the middle between the two clans, but the river ending in the lake goes first through the Port of Clear Water. So as long as I block up the river, the amount of water in the lake will be reduced and they will start to fight against each other. This is also exactly the reason, why I chose the Sandstone Clan and the Black Bone Clan, their

relationship was never harmonious. “

“Then are you worried about the matter of the pills?”

Garcia didn’t give him a reply, however, just at this moment a guard knocked once more on the door and announced, “Your Majesty, the priest of the church, Dicar.”

“Bring him in,” the Queen stood up and her face became darker.

“Your Majesty, Garcia Wimbledon, I greet you on behalf of the Holy City,” the priest entered the terrace while bowing.

“Pills? Why is it that the previous batches of pills that had always been served timely, but this batch got so much delayed?” Garcia asked coldly.

“Your Majesty no need for anger, this is exactly the reason I came,” Dicar had to wipe the sweat from his forehead, “You asked to buy 5000 pills, but that is just too much, even if we take all the pills produced for the Hermes we can’t fulfill your request. This time I brought as much as I could with me.”

“How much?” Interrupted Garcia.

“One thousand.” Said Dicar in a consoling voice, “the rest will be sent after a while.”

“And it will still be the same as previously promised?” Garcia’s facial expression got a bit nicer, “You now I want to have as many as I can. Also where have you stored the pills? I’ll immediately send someone to fetch them.”

“In the church, the gold royals...”

“This time, I won’t reduce the number of gold royals,” Garcia stepped directly in front of Dicar and whispered into his ear, “but if the delivering of the pills get further delayed, your head will hang on the highest mast of my flagship, and I can guarantee you, the archbishop won’t shed a single tear for you.”

Hearing this the priest turn pale and directly asked to be excused.

When he had left, Garcia went back to the railing and looked out over the sea. Her hair was lifted up by the sea breeze, just like the flags of her ships, waving in the wind.

“You were right, I’m worried about the pills.” Garcia’s voice seemed distant. “If Timothy had waited two months longer, my preparation would have been more adequate, but he had moved too fast.”

“You’ve done a great job,” Ryan thought to himself, who could have done a better job? The moment she had occupied Eagle City, she had already started to prepare the path for her retreat. She had ordered her soldiers to take away all of the usable materials and residents, while at the same time she let ditches be dug out everywhere in the city, afterward filling them up with black water.

Since they had a shortage of manpower, Garcia exchanged the territory between the Southern Border and the Wildland for the support of the Sandpeople. She then gave the Clan warriors some pills and let them attack Timothy's knights from both sides, however, to ensure that her loyal supporters were able to resist the last overwhelming charge, they didn't hesitate for a moment to swallow the secret drugs themselves.

"The secret medicine provided by the church wasn't like what they had told, allowing alive without any obstructions. After swallowing them once, if they didn't get the next dose fast enough, the medication will turn into poison, letting them become weak and later die in pain because of muscle atrophy. If it were only the Sandpeople I wouldn't care, but the people who worked for me deserve something better. "She paused," Ryan, take some men to receive the pills and distribute them under our heroic warriors. But only use half of them, this way we can last a little longer."

"Just as you wish, Your majesty."

As Ryan was already halfway to the door, they could hear the guards voice for the third time through the door, "Your Majesty, we have just received a secret letter from King's City."

"Wait a moment, let's read the letter first and then you can go," Garcia ordered.

"Yes, Your Majesty," Ryan received the letter from the guard, broke the seal, and removed the parchment. Most of these letters contained information sent by the spies hidden in all parts of the country. They were never signed, never had a recipient written on

it and its content was also always as concise and clear as possible normally. But when he saw the first sentence, his whole body was suddenly rooted.

“On the twenty-second day of spring, the church seized the capital of the Kingdom of the Eternal Winter, declaring that the kingdom is now under their rule.”

Chapter 137 - Secret Meeting

When he opened the thick wooden door, the light fragrance of straw hit him in the face, Archbishop Maine liked this mixed smell of herbs and spicy candles, especially in a space which had no windows for ventilation. Every time he smelled this combination of scents, his mind became clear and he felt at peace.

The chamber wasn't particularly large, it offered just enough space for one round table and four chairs. The other two archbishops were already seated on their chairs, while the chair facing the wooden door was still empty. The Pope's physical condition had been deteriorating in recent times, it was almost half a year ago, since the last time he had shown himself in front of anyone. Only for cases that were too difficult to solve by themselves would he leave Hermes' underground castle, seeking the answers for himself.

"It seems everyone is there, so let's get started," Mayne announced. he then bolted the door and sat between the other two, "Archbishop Tayfun, what are the last reports from the Kingdom of Eternal Winter?"

"Besides some former nobles, there are only a few other places where they still rebel against our rule, 'au contraire' it seems the civilians are even welcoming us to take over the kingdom." Tayfun explained while stroking his beard, "Of course, those stubborn nobles, holding on to the dreams of their past glory, will be eradicated soon enough."

"That's sounds really good" Heather licked her lips. "In the case

that you let me hold the next trial, the civilians will all become more aware of how ugly and dirty the former nobility were, but unfortunately, I still have a lot of things I still have to do here, so I can't go to the Kingdom's of Eternal Winter's King's City."

Mayne ignored her words, and instead spoke to Tayfun, "We have to fill those vacant positions of power, as soon as possible with our own people. During the years that have passed, the Church has trained a lot of skilled people and now the time has finally arrived that we can use them." However, the Kingdom of Eternal Winter has forever been the kingdom in which our Church had the biggest influence, but if we are able to ride on this wave, we will be able to handle the Wolfsheart Kingdom and the Kingdom of Dawn a lot sooner.

"That seems only natural."

"What should happen with the nobility who have always relied on the Church, or to the ones who always turns in the direction the wind blows?" Heather asked, "the reason why the Church was able to attract so many good believers, was because we didn't ask for their lineage, but for their actual skills. However, those idiots would shake the foundation of our entire Church... so my idea is..." She made a gesture of slicing open her neck.

"In the beginning we still have to use them, to reduce the resistance we received, but after the kingdom has become stable, we can talk about them then." Regarding this point, they had deliberately decided to ask the Pope, "the church can provide them with the same authority equivalent to their title, but this position can not be inherited by their future generations. After all, our end

goal is to destroy the kingship, so don't be anxious for the moment, Lady Heather."

Heather had been born poor and before she had been accepted by the Church, she had suffered from hunger and living a homeless life. But with a naturally keen mind and gift of extraordinary judgment of the human character, she had climbed up in the ranks until she had reached the position she held today. Mayne was well aware of her dislike for the nobility, but for the moment it was more important to look at the overall situation.

"What is the actual situation within the Kingdom of Graycastle?" Mayne asked.

"Our spy network reported that after his defeat, King Timothy didn't come back to King's City and instead went to directly stay within the Eastern Territory." Replied Teflon.

"A smart choice," Heather snapped her fingers, "he has taken Duke Frances with him to challenge the Queen of Clearwater, yet the Duke died during their attack and now he immediately went back to the east and divided the Duke's territory to stabilize the morale of his soldiers and at the same time to win over the other nobles, Gee... the royal family doesn't only consist of fools."

"In this way, we can save a lot of trouble, let the High Priest of the Kingdom of Graycastle get in contact with him. Timothy's situation has become so precarious; he won't be able to refuse our offer. We will reduce Port of Clearwater's drug supply by 30% and with this balancing the strength between those two. This situation will be handled by you Tayfun," Mayne decided, "After two years'

there won't be any soldiers in the kingdom left to stop our conquest."

"You can rest assured," Tayfun nodded. "But ... there is something wrong with the situation at the Longsong Stronghold in the Western territory."

"What is the problem?"

"The 4th Prince Roland, after his victory against Duke Ryan, he immediately went back to Border Town, and furthermore he didn't answer to High Priest Taylor's offer, doesn't he have any intention of fighting for the throne?"

"Well ... what are your thoughts about it?" Mayne asked while looking in Heather's direction.

The latter just shrugged: "What else can I say... What were the rumors about him again? He has a nasty character, is incompetence, has neither any learning nor skills to speak of and he's also known to be greedy. How was it possible that such a person could win against the Longsong Stronghold? The answer to this question is very simple, he deceived everyone, whether it was the other nobles or us."

"You mean ..." Mayne frowned.

"We have chosen the wrong person, Lord Mayne," she sneered. "He is the one who should have been on the main stage, not the 3r

Princes Garcia.”

“That he was able to defeat the Duke truly showed his talent, but even if he was such a skilled person, without the resources he will be unable to fully display his skills.” Tayfun shook his head in disagreement, “Since he chose to return to that piece of desolate earth, it seems that he has given up on his chance to reach the throne, and because of this he won’t be causing any threat to our plan.”

“That’s seems to be correct, theoretically. But there is another interesting piece of information you shouldn’t overlook either,” Heather threw out a note, “This information was something I gathered with my personal eyes.”

Mayne spread open the note and quickly swept through its contents, “Witch?”

“Uh-huh, they’re one of those witch organizations. They call themselves the Witch Cooperation Association and claim for themselves to have a firm foothold in Border Town and now ask others sisters to also gather there. While this is only hearsay and could be a groundless accusation, but this doesn’t seem to be the case. We already know that the name isn’t fictional. We have already sent our Army of Judges against them once and after their defeat in the Eastern Forest, they crossed over the whole country, only to ultimately disappear somewhere west of Longsong Stronghold. Border Town is just west of Longsong Stronghold, directly next to the kingdom’s border and the foot of the Impassable Mountain Range. Two important powers situated at the same location, isn’t that a little too much of a coincidence?”

Witch Cooperation Association... I also have some impression of that name, during their whole journey they often had to face the Army of Judges and even after losing a lot of their staff they still insisted on moving in the direction of the Impassable Mountain Range. According to the information gathered from some of the tortured witches, it seemed they wanted to find the Holy Mountain, located somewhere to the west of the mountain range. It was just a suicidal move, so we did not put much energy into this matter. There are even similar witch organizations within the Kingdom of Dawn and the Wolfsheart Kingdom. They are always lurking within the cities, and after some time they suddenly rush in the direction of the Wild Lands, only to throw away their lives against an even stronger threat.”

“You mean, the Prince and the witch organization both hooked up?” After reading the news Tayfun’s face became a lot darker.

“Maybe, maybe not.” Heather smiled, “That is only a simple guess on my part. What do the witches fear the most? ‘Exposure’. And it is obvious that they will draw all the more attention when they use the name of their Witch Cooperation Association, but they still use the name for their underground message. Why is that?”

“Because it’s a familiar name to us,” Mayne said quietly. “However that’s also the same for the other witches.”

“Full marks!” exclaimed Heather clapping her hands, “This will effectively reduce the wild witches wariness, perhaps there will really be someone who could be attracted by this news and decides

to go to Border Town to explore what the actual situation might be. It's not hard to imagine this, since Border Town is without any member of the Church to overlook them, they would perhaps dare to do such a thing. We often say that it's better to choose the lesser of two evils. Obviously, the other side has considered this and decided that the consequences of being unable to recruit witches is more serious than the consequences of them being exposed..." Here her voice became gloomy, "And I don't like the feeling of being underestimated."

"This isn't a small problem," Teflon road angrily, "Once the witches have settled down, they will be able to fully display their capabilities without any fear, it's also very likely that the so-called demon phage can also be avoided. This is exactly the reason why we encircle every settled down witch, only when we can force them into hiding or let them run into the exile, are we able to keep it a secret from them.

Mayne knew that the Teflon side of the argument was right, a witch alone wasn't a real threat to the Church, but as a group, it was a completely different matter altogether. And once they got rid of their identity as the "Devil's messenger", the Church's propaganda would soon be exposed. Resulting in a great loss of influence for them, maybe even shaking the Church's foundation.

He was now caught in a dilemma as they encountered such a possibility of whether they should send a large number Judges to encircle the witches' base, but in the end Border Town was too far away from Hermes, and furthermore, the Church's army should be attacking the Wolfsheart Kingdom soon. So, it was now too difficult to split off the manpower that they needed to wipe out this remote town. Coupled with the problem that if they were to

send out such a large number of troops into the Kingdom of Graycastle, it was guaranteed that the nobility of the kingdom and of the other two countries would soon become vigilance, which could lead to a failure of the entire plan overall.

After much deliberation, they finally came to a decision.

"I will send a priest with ten Judges on a mission to Border Town, they should investigate this matter together with the High Priest. If the Witch Cooperation Association was acting independently from the Prince, the force should be strong enough to eliminate all the witches."

"But what about if they are related to each other?" Heather asked.

The God's Punishment Army was only allowed to march if they were led by Mayne himself or a few other high ranking members of the church, this rule had been personally made by the Pope. Remembering this he answered: "Then they should bring the news back to us and I will personally lead the God's Punishment Army to march against Border Town."

Chapter 138 - Establishment Of The Ministry Of Agriculture

The Forest south of the Redwater River had been nearly been fully cleared out, and the day to start with its cultivation was getting ever closer.

In order to facilitate the people who were crossing over the Redwater River, Roland had commissioned for a nearly one-hundred-meter-long pontoon to be used. The pontoon was created from tens of wooden rafts, which were connected together with thick hemp ropes. He had also specially ordered for the carpenters to build the rafts, both of the ends being pointed, in this way, minimizing the amount of water resistance as far as possible. The hemp rope had been tied around four wooden pillars on both sides of the river, fixing the rafts position together as far as possible. Between each raft laid four long planks with one end of it on each deck, they were two meters long and together they were four-meter wide from side to side.

A pontoon built out of rafts was very simple to set up, yet its service time wasn't as short as would be expected. As long as the water level didn't rise or fall by too much, which could lead to the wearing out of the hemp rope. The pontoon could easily be used for two or three years – the trees of the forest was an excellent material. For example, the Border Town's pier was a good indicator and built out of the giant trees of the forest, it was nearly as old as the town itself by now. Despite the fact that walking on top of would give off a creaking sound, it still didn't show any sign that it would collapse.

On the western side of the pontoon, the first part of the reclaimed land of the forest became Leaves' testing area. Now that they were no longer surrounded by the forest, it had now been tidily enclosed by the members of the First Army. During these past few days with the exception of eating, going to school and sleeping, Leaves spent all of her time here inside of her garden. Out of the window in his third story office, Roland could faintly overlook the scene in this wooden enclosure – where the wheat was growing at a crazy rate, while in the morning there would only be green seedlings, and in the afternoon the whole area has turned into a golden wheat sea.

When relying on magic, her Golden Ones would only need one day after being planted to become ready to be harvest, if this was to be seen by an outsiders, they would surely fall to their knees in disbelief and cry out “Miracle, truly this must be a miracle”.

Seeing that the land, the population, and the seeds had all been set, Roland decided that it was time to decide on the last element—the custodian.

He called his constantly busy assistant minister Barov.

And when he entered his office, Roland asked him: “Your chief apprentice should be able to take over by now, right? I need to set up two new departments at the Town Hall.”

“Your Royal Highness, this is... our manpower is not enough for this.” Barov insisted.

Previously you would always first agree with me and only later would we slowly work out the details. But now it seems you always directly start with complaining. Roland secretly criticized his assistant minister, but on his face, nothing could be seen of his thoughts, “How can it not be enough, didn’t I recently allocated a group of knights to you?”

During his preliminary round of screening, Roland had discovered that more than 50 knights met his requirements of reading and writing. Naturally, that would be too many teachers, so after once more screening for the best ones, he finally selected nine knights as junior teachers, and assigned all the others as apprentices in the Town Hall.

“Your Royal Highness, those people are totally lazy and dragging their feet on every job, their response time is also very slow and by the time they finally manage to copy over some information, they even end up making a lot of mistakes, in the end they are simply unqualified to become apprentices.”

“How to discipline them is up to you,” Roland slammed the table, “If they bluntly disobey the arrangement, send them directly to the North Slope Mine! But these two departments must be set up!”

“Well, Your Highness, you will always have the final say.” Barov gave up helplessly.

Roland said: “The first is the Ministry of Agriculture, which will be responsible for supervising the agricultural territory and the planting process.”

Barov was immediately stunned, it was the first time that he heard that the Town's Hall was even responsible for managing food production, "Your Highness, shouldn't this matter be directly decided by the serfs themselves? We have nothing to do with how much and what they decide to plant, we are only responsible for making sure that all their taxes are paid in full."

"That's exactly the reason why you... no, I mean why the crop's we harvest in the past was so low." Roland quickly took his cup and drank some water, trying to cover up his slip of the tongue, "The Town Hall should be responsible for taking care that everyone has enough to eat and drink."

"Let everyone have enough to eat and drink... certainly you must be joking, right?"

"Of course not, how important it is, that everyone should have something to eat and drink doesn't even need to be said, if the town's hall is unable to ensure that everyone has enough to eat, then they aren't doing their job, but by then I will also be guilty of neglecting my duty. As for the latter part, wasn't the public toilet project started for exactly this purpose?" Roland no longer spoke in a relaxed voice, and instead seriously said, "I don't know how the Capital's City Hall used to handle this, perhaps the life and death of the civilians do not matter so much to them, but here in Border Town, I want to implement a holistic political organization. It is absolutely necessary that the people in my territory know about it so that they will wholeheartedly support us, and we can easily keep on governing them. At present, it is important that we create this ministry and have them undertake this mission."

“Understood, Your Highness.” Barov said as he had to wipe the sweat from his forehead.

“You will go to the archives and look for three or four people who are experienced farmers and can work in the Ministry of Agriculture, and you will then choose two of your own apprentices who will be in charge of the keeping the records and statistics, finally forming a group of six people.”

“Wait... you want those civilians to become Town’s Hall officials?” Barov looked shocked at the idea.

“Not only are they obedient, they are even more likely to work with plenty of enthusiasm, so why shouldn’t they serve as officials? Officials aren’t equal to nobles, and the Ministry of Agriculture also need some professionals farmers to guide the future generation.”

“Most of them do not even know how to read or write...”

“That is exactly the reason why you have to send two of your apprentices out there, they will go along to do the paperwork,” Roland directly interrupted.

“And this problem won’t exist for too much longer. I’m going to implement an educational program for everyone soon, or at least that is the plan for now. By then, nearly all of the people will be able to read and write and you will no longer have to worry about whether you won’t have enough hands.”

Obviously, the message that civilians would start to work in the Town Hall was an enormous surprise for Barov, his mouth was slightly open and for a long time he was unable to say another word.

Roland, disregarding whether Barov could accept it or not, just continued with giving his speech: “Back to the topic of setting up the Ministry of Agriculture, when the serfs began to farm their own land, it’s bound to happen that they will use various kinds of methods, for example how deep they will plow the soil will all be done differently.

This is an excellent opportunity for observation, so the Ministry of Agriculture should split all the farms into groups of six and each member of the ministry will record every step taken by his designated farmers. Things like how deep they plow, what kind of planting interval they use and so on. It will be necessary that they work on it in as detailed a manner as possible, and that all of them will get some measuring tools and be taught on how to use them.

“You mean we are going to measure their... contrast?” Barov was clearly old fashioned in some areas, but he was definitely a quick thinker overall.

“That’s right, for the first time, it was needless to care too much about the harvest. We will still maintain importing the food as we have been... furthermore, we will also start to use some new wheat seeds to make sure that no one has to starve anymore. The job of the Ministry of Agriculture is to find the best method to planting, and later they have to promote, teach and supervise the way in

which wheat is planted in the future.

Roland didn't know much about farming, but this did not prevent him from using a scientific approach to summarize a set of optimal solutions. With this program, both the expansion of the cultivated area, or to add several new kinds of seeds to try, would help him to raise the average output to a whole new level.

Barov nodded at first but then he hesitated and after a while, he finally asked, "Your Highness, there is one thing that I don't understand, when the serfs are promoted to free people, why will you only charge them 20% of their harvest as a tax? Even if you asked them to hand over 50%, letting them keep 50% for themselves, you would still be seen as extremely benevolent."

"Because there is no meaning in hoarding all the money in the basement," Roland explained, "When I need more than the 20%, I will buy the rest of the food from them at a fixed price – in Border Town, the trade with food only belongs to the right of the Lord. They have to deliver all the food to the castle and will be paid for it. After some saving they will most likely want to buy things like cattle, iron tools, beef, cotton clothes, and good brick houses. And all of this can only be provided by me for the town's people, if they want to buy food it will be the same thing for them, they can only buy it from the castle. In this way, the coin will still flow back into my pocket, but as long as it is cycling, it will be able to raise everyone's standard of living. Are you able to follow me with this?"

Barov wore a frowning expression, it was clear that he was still caught up in processing this information.

Roland smiled and shook his head, “It isn’t a problem if you don’t understand it yet, you can go back and think about it later, at the moment it is more important that you follow my orders.”

Hearing this the assistant minister stood up as if he were in trance, but when he reached for the door, he suddenly looked back.

“Your highness, you just said you want to build two departments, what is the other one?”

“The Ministry of Education,” Roland replied, “However, for that I will be the one personally responsible.”

Chapter 139 - The Devil's Power

When Barov returned to his office in the Town Hall, he immediately closed the door behind himself.

My God, cold shivers were running down his spine, he immediately firmly grasped the God's Stone of Retaliation hanging around his neck, once more starting to feel safe. It seems His Royal Highness really has become possessed by the devil. Previously he had only thought of it as a sort of crazy speculation, but now he was almost certainly, the one with whom he had just talked was definitely not the 4th Prince.

Barov could still accept his huge character changes with him becoming somewhat eccentric, but how was it possible that he would suddenly have so much new knowledge about topics he had never had any former contact with? Such a thing he had only heard of happening in myth, but in the legends, it was always God who had possessed a mortal body, moving to lead humanity out of their predicament. But since when did the Devil start loving to do the same thing?

If Roland Wimbledon acted like a king and engaged himself in the management of his territory (though that would become a challenging situation), Barov would not be too surprised to learn that the previous information of the 4th Prince was without learning or any skills turned out to be false, but his character still couldn't be disguised. After all, it was always possible that someone had just secretly taught him how to govern a city or even a country.

But Barov had never heard anything about the ideas and programs coming out of the Prince's mouth. Yet, he had previously worked for twenty years in the Capital's City Hall, even becoming the finance minister, so he should have a deep knowledge about how to organize and operate a Town Hall. As a minister, he had had been in charge of many areas, and he even had made numerous secret deals before, but he had never betrayed his higher ups.

The King had issued a decree, that a minister could decide who would work under him. So, each minister had his own power, and they all ended up handling it differently. For example, the minister responsible for the defense of the King's City had hundreds of knights and mercenary under his control. At the same time, those underground organization also had a lot of influence. When these forces began to rampage, they would most of the time be eying the criminals, but even as a noble it would soon become difficult to stay in the city. They could only wait for the king to place them into prison.

But this wasn't only in the King's City, other cities also had the same situation.

So, if I want to become a Lord or King, the most important thing I would need is a big aristocracy or others with an influential background.

If they did not have enough money to recruit any men, could it be that they had any other option that they could lean on? And the more people they controlled, the more they would be valued by others, after all, so many people can't be wrong, right?

But the Prince's approach completely subverted Barov's concept of how things worked. He was still the minister and still had his own apprentices, but everyone else was directly recruited and paid for by the Town Hall. In other words, even if he was to die, they could easily exchange him for a new person, or directly raise a person up from below him.

This was a completely new system to him, Barov was now sure of it, the Price was implementing a completely new political system for the Kingdom of Graycastle.

Some people may think that this was just some kind of wishful thinking on the part of Roland, or that Roland believed himself to be infallible. But Barov didn't think so, he took a quill and recorded down all of His Highness' requirements.

Looking at the plans, it seemed everything was intertwined, nothing was forgotten.

First, he had to manage the eat and drink for all project.

Barov naturally knew that with a stronger control over the people, the instructions issued by the Lord would be executed faster. But doing it in this way, it would also greatly increase the workload for the management, from where was he meant to get all these people who would need to know how to read and write? Furthermore, this would also greatly burden the Lord's own treasury, only a few Lords would be willing to do this.

And then he turned his attention to His Highness second project, the recruitment of civilians into the City Hall and the education of all civilians.

When Barov thought about these two projects, he couldn't suppress a shiver.

If His Highness ends up being able to implement everything, how will Border Town look like?

Any civilian will be able to read and write, and as long as the Town Hall wants to increase their workforce, they would be able to find a large number of suitable personnel. And with the possibility to enter the Town Hall, this will, in turn, promote the universal access to the education system. Getting a rewarding position, while at the same time getting a social upgrade, I'm afraid that it would only take one or two years, until everyone will take the initiative to request for an education, even if they cannot get it for themselves, they will definitely plan to send their children to college.

Plus, with all the previous employers' compensation paid for by the Town Hall, the civilians will no longer need to work all the time to get enough to eat, which is equal to completely breaking away from the situation that only the nobility has the capital to serve as administrative officials.

There is no doubt that only the Devil is able to come up with such a revolutionary system.

Barov took a deep breath, gripping the God's Stone of Retaliation

with his hands, there was now only one question left, could the devil also be something good?

If someone said that the Prince was evil, he would be the first one to stand up to defend him.

In his eyes, the actions of the 4th Prince could be even seen as the moves of a wise King. Even those Kings from the legends of the past never cared as much about the lives of the civilians as did the king. He even bought enough food to feed the civilians using his own money, so that all the common people who had stayed with him inside Border Town, would be able to safely cross the Months of Demons. Furthermore, all these Devil's technologies and equipment were all meant for the development of Border Town; even these evil witches, they all used their abilities in order to improve the people's lives.

Barov suddenly had the feeling that even if Roland became the next King of the Kingdom of Graycastle, it wouldn't be such a bad thing after all.

Thinking of his father's own teachings: If he had nothing to say, he shouldn't be the one to speak, if he didn't want to know the answer then he also shouldn't be the one to ask, so he decided to hide his discovery deep within his heart. Since it was the devil, and the Church are already eyeing us, if the outer appearance was wrong, he could start an ambush in the Devil's own camp and expose him for a lot of eyewitnesses.

He shook the bell, calling for Sirius Daly who had recently joined the Town Hall.

Compared with the other stupid and arrogant knights, this young knight from the Wolf Family could be regarded as someone truly outstanding, although he still had the pride of being a former knight, he was still willing to listen to what his teachers had to say.

“Teacher, what do you have for me?” After shutting the door behind himself he saluted before Barov.

“His Royal Highness plans to open up a new ministry, it will be in charge of supervising the crop’s cultivation and we will need at least two apprentices to help them with the records,” Barov repeated Roland’s request in front of him, “In addition, you should go to the Town’s Hall and pick out ten people who meet the requirements, searching for at least ten possible candidates, and afterwards go through another screening.

“Although the others are only civilians, His Highness has insisted on putting them into the Town Hall as well. If some of them show outstanding performance, perhaps they can even become the head of the Ministry of Agriculture, hey...” He sighed, “You will be in charge of the record keeping, however when the spring plowing is finished, I will take you back.”

“Teacher, only two people will be selected from the Town Hall,” he proudly said, “I am also very familiar with this procedure.”

“You?” Barov became stunned.

“Yes! Before I became a knight, I had helped my father to manage

the farm, so I know everything about the wheat planting.” Sirius paused. “But when His Highness asked me if I had any other expertise, I did not say it... because I feared that he would send me to the farmland, to work with the serfs.

Barov liked what he heard, he had both requirements, the education and knowledge of farm work, even if the civilian population joined the Ministry of Agriculture, he still have a candidate that could take over the lead position. For now, Sirius was loyal to him, so after he became the head, it would be the same as having the influence of the Ministry of Agriculture.

“Well,” Barov began, forming his words into a profitable promise, “Do a good job, and maybe you can climb to an even higher position than before.”

When Sirius had left his office, Barov leaned against his chair while humming a light tone.

Since he now knew that His Highness was possessed by the Devil, he had to seize as much power as possible. The Devil was always full of appreciation for ambitious people, this was commonly known and recorded in the legends. And for himself, whether his rights were conferred by the King or granted by the Devil, both privileges were equally as sweet.

Chapter 140 - Seeds

Shortly after the assistant minister had left Roland's office, the Prince received some good news.

The guard whose mission was to travel to the Port of Clearwater and buy a few crops had just come back.

Directly after having received the message Roland went into the back garden, where he saw Shawn already busy unloading several sacks from the horseback.

It was almost a month since the day of his departure, and now as Roland looked at Shawn's present appearance he discovered that the man's skin had become a lot tanner while his body became somewhat thinner.

When he saw that the Prince had appeared in the garden, Shawn immediately stood up straight and greeted him with a salute. Roland then trotted forward to his side and patted his shoulder, "Well done, have these sacks all been filled with seeds?"

Shawn squatted down and unlocked the sacks on the ground, "Pearl Rice, Earth Eggs, Sugar Sticks... those plants are exactly as you have described them. All of them I could only buy in the Port of Clearwater and they were indeed mostly produced in the Fjords. There, they have a lot of farmlands where they are cultivating these crops."

"Did you ask the businessmen about the what the right planting

method are?"

"I asked, but they couldn't tell me any specific methods to use, they could only tell me that after these plants leave the South it will become difficult to plant them." Shawn grasped a handful of yellow seeds from one of the packages, then showing it to Roland said, "Your Royal Highness, this is pearl rice. The trader said that if I bought them together with the pearl rod, I could get them for a little cheaper. But taking all the pearl bars would be too heavy and inconvenient to carry, so I only bought a sack full of pearl rice and the rest are all only normal seeds."

There was no doubt that the pearl rice was the corn he was most familiar with. So, Roland excitedly picked up some corn grains and took a closer look at them. Some of them seemed to be dried fruits apparently they had been stored as winter rations. The yield of corn production was much higher than that of the natural wheat and it had a much lower soil quality requirements, coupled with Leaves' transformation ability, he might be able to replace the wheat with corn as the new main ration.

Afterwards Shawn opened another package, within it Roland could see a mass of round and leather-like brown crop, "These were the earth eggs, I was able to eat them during my stay in an inn in the Port of Clearwater, they were peeled and cut into small pieces and then thrown into bubbling water. When chewing, it is very crisp, and has a light sweet taste."

Seeing this familiar shape, Roland heart was full of emotions. This was clearly a potato! He dug his fingers into the potato and peeled it open, revealing the deep yellow potato meat. The next

potato's size wasn't as big and its color also wasn't to the darker side, not one earth egg looked like the other. He also noticed that there were some potatoes which had the same lengthily form similar to carrots.

"If this stuff get crushed first and then later steamed until it turned into a paste, the potatoes will become even more delicious."

"Uh ... you have already eaten them, Your Highness?"

"Well, it was during one of the feasts in the palace," Roland decided to sprinkle a little lie, after all, always hearing the name earth egg was just too confusing, "In the royal kitchen, they didn't call them earth eggs, but instead they called them potatoes and this delicious steamed snack is called mashed potatoes."

"So it was something like this, it seemed that Your Highness is indeed really well-informed." Shawn exclaimed, then he went straight to the next sack and open it, within it Roland could see many black sticks," Your Royal Highness, I think this crop is the most important one I brought with me. The honey in the Port of Clearwater is so cheap, and it was largely because of this crop. I heard the news in a pub that more and more farmers have began to switch the crop on their farmland into these sugar sticks, and this magical plant is actually really sweet. When you cut open it's outer skin, you can squeeze out a kind of syrup from it. Furthermore, its price is only one-tenth of that of honey and when it is mixed into a drink it tastes isn't inferior at all to that of honey water."

"..." Roland would have liked to say that he had also already seen this crop and that it was called sugar cane, but after thinking about

it for a short moment he didn't care any longer. They had already started to plant it in huge amounts, so by now it would already be too late to try and change its name. The other materials of the sugar cane, could also be used for many other things. For example, they could also be used to produce ethanol and this crop was able to raise the civilians' happiness to a completely new level. After all, the bread made from normal flour was nearly tasteless, but after sprinkling some sugar on it, its taste would be enhanced by several times, even salt wasn't as important as this, Roland thought.

“Were you able to find any other crops seeds?”

“This was all I could find in the Port of Clearwater,” after saying that, he took five to six small bags out and gave them to the Prince “But before I started my journey you explained to me, that in case I find any crop which we don't already grow here in Border Town, I should bring them back with me. Within these packages are seeds of some plants I've gathered as I passed through the Fallen Dragon Ridge and Willow Town, they are grapes, soybeans, cotton, flax and olive tree seeds. But the farmer say that the grapes won't grow out of seeds but you needed to stick the branches into the ground for it to grow. Although its seed can still be planted, but its germination process is very slow and the appearing grape has neither the highest amount nor is it very tasty.

Since I have Leaves here, this shouldn't be a problem for me, Roland thought. Now that he had grape seeds, maybe he could have another try with his idea of a wheat tree. As for soybean, cotton, flax and olives they were also all very useful crops. After I let Leaves improve the soil in the West I will let some serfs cultivate them at a small-scale. So, that the Ministry of Agriculture who is responsible for summing up the planting process can add

them to their manual.

“Your Highness, there is still some other news I have to report to you,” Shawn whispered, “it is about the situation in Clearwater.”

“Are they about my sister Garcia?”

Shawn nodded, “I spent nearly two weeks in the Port of Clearwater, and with the exception of the time I needed to buy seeds, I spent most of the rest of the time in pubs. There were rumors that your sister Garcia Wimbledon and the Sandpeople have reached an agreement. She has allowed them to live at the southern edge of her territory and the Sandpeople had instead decided to accept her as their Queen and to follow her recruitment orders. During my stay in the city, I also saw plenty of Sandpeople walking through the streets.

The Extreme South is the territory of the Sandpeople... Although the people of Border Town don't ask others for their origin, but letting a large number of people from a foreign territory settle in your own territory is a completely different matter. It seems that in order to insure that she can conquer the throne for herself, Garcia is really willing do almost anything, Roland thought.

“The Sandpeople are divided into many smaller factions, so I cannot believe that all of them decided to listen to her instructions. Do you know which clans are the ones following her orders?

Shawn shook his head, “The Sandpeople are very wary of the people from our kingdom, even using some gold royals I still

wasn't able to buy any more information, but... there was one more strange thing that happened on the day prior to when I'd intended to leave the Port of Clearwater. On that day Garcia had returned after her victory at Eagle City and everywhere within the city they celebrate their Queen's victory against the pseudo-king, King Timothy. But the next day, they detected four to five people murdered and one victim was even torn to pieces in the middle of the street."

"In the following days the Port of Clearwater was closed down and so I had to stay there for the next three days. During the time, all the pubs were closed, and everyone would gather in the inn's lobby to talk about what information they had heard. Some people thought that it was the revenge of the pseudo King, but one of the fishermen said that he had witnessed one of the murders. The murderer wasn't tall and also was clearly not a man of the Sandpeople, but his strength and speed wasn't anything like what a normal man could reach. He was later killed by the guards, but even after being hit by a lot of knife slashes he still didn't go down. In addition, his blood looked completely differently than that of a mortal and only after even more guards rushed to the crime scene, were they finally able to wear him down with their spears. When the closing order was lifted, I didn't dare to stay for any longer, and immediately came back to bring you your seeds."

"You have done a good job," after thinking for a short moment Roland continued. "You don't need to return the gold royals you still have left over from buying the seeds to the Town Hall."

"Thank you so much for your reward, Your Highness!"

“A strength and speed far beyond what is possible for an ordinary person, ignoring the pain caused by knife injuries, all this just sounds like... the Church’s pills.” When Shawn had left Nightingale’s voice immediately sounded next to Roland’s ear.

“I thought the same,” Roland frowned, “according to Shawn’s explanations, Garcia got the pills even earlier than me. The Church supported both sides that are competing against each other for the throne at the same time... In the end, what was it that they have in mind?” Within his mind the traces of a bad possibilities popped up, can it be that the purpose of all their actions isn’t in order to insure a stable future for the Kingdom of Greycastle, but something else?

Chapter 141 - Kisses

Later that evening, Roland sat in his office and began to think about new equipment.

The fact that the Church's pills had also appeared in the Port of Clearwater brought him a strong sense of crisis. He could even feel his scalp tingling all the time, regardless if it was the fact that the Church was supporting both him and Garcia in their fight for the throne, or the thought of Garcia's thousands of additional men she got from her alliance.

Thinking of the thousands of soldiers who are wrapped in iron armor and able to run at speeds equal to a full-on cavalry charge, it was hard not to become overwhelmed by such an image. Stopping such a massive charge with his thin rows of gunners would be a tough task for him. As soon as one person was able to reach his ranks, his First Army would come to receive heavy losses.

Fortunately, this pill didn't make someone immune to injuries, even with the medication the consumer's body was still made of flesh and blood.

He had to create weapons that had a higher firing rate and precision, which would also be able to fire over a longer distance.

But without mercury fulminate as the primer, Roland had to find another way to bypass this hurdle, and until then he had to produce some alternative equipment to deal with any possible crises.

And with Anna's new ability he had the confidence in achieving this. Now as long as he could draw the design, Anna would be able to process the object he wanted to create accurately. But also, her efficiency has reached an extraordinary level compared with all the prior tasks where the blacksmith had to create each part of the flintlock carefully; she could now stack several pieces together and form and cut them all at the same time.

With a universal education system and a unified measuring system, he had prepared all the steps he needed for starting a large-scale industrialized production work. But that doesn't mean that he can take a shortcut each time he comes across one. Anna's new capacity was simply a treasure house; carrying an endless potential with it that he could tap into. Every afternoon Roland was now at the testing area at the North Slope Mountain, studying and exploring together with Anna on the usage of her new ability. And in case he didn't have any time to spare, he would let her practice her control by carving some small items such as little witch dolls.

However, at the moment, it seemed that her carving skill was still at the stage of immaturity, but Roland believed firmly that one day his whole bookcase would be filled with colorful witch dolls... probably, right?

He picked up a steel ruler and placed it on the parchment, using it to draw two straight lines, at this moment he heard someone knocking at his door.

As long as a guard didn't shoot some information, then nine out of ten times it was a witch at his door. At this moment, most of the

witches were in the living room on the first floor, undergoing Scroll's writing and reading lessons. So, the person at the door could only be someone who didn't have to participate in primary teaching, and there was only one witch who didn't need them.

"Come in."

Sure, enough, when the door was opened, Anna came stepping into the room.

She gently closed the door and then went to Roland's side at the table, holding the phantom image of a book in her arms.

Since the beginning of the lessons he could daily see her with a copy of his book, he had to say, even though Anna wasn't very talkative, her popularity within the group of witches was unexpectedly good. Thinking about the past, it was the same with Nana, who was attached to her like she was her tail. Perhaps she was born with a natural charm to attract other witches?

"How can I help you?"

"Well," she nodded in greeting and then laid the book she was holding open in front of Roland. "Here... you said that everything in the world was made up of tiny balls, which are all different from one another, but later on you also wrote that they could be turned into... waves?"

"What are waves? Anna asked.

“When you throw a stone into the water, the rising ripples are waves,” the Prince coughed twice, “This is just a concept, but this is good enough, you don’t need to get to the bottom of it.”

“Why?”

Because I don’t know it myself, Roland cried out silently; Quantum mechanics is a mysterious and unexplored subject, and as long as I don’t know something I won’t write about it. Even if that might be the truth, I can’t say it aloud,

“Because the balls have the characteristics of waves but they also possess the characteristics of matter. We are the same as those tiny balls, only that our mass is too big, making it difficult for us to observe the fluctuation as they happen. As for a deeper understanding, it will still take several generations of research.”

He thought for a moment and then added, “Because this phenomenon is opposite to our common sense it is tough for us to understand. For us, it’s hard to imagine a four-dimensional space inside of the three-dimensional world. So, you don’t need to put it into your heart.”

Anna curled up her lips, clearly showing that she wasn’t satisfied with Roland’s explanation, but she quickly asked, “What is a four-dimensional space?”

“...”

When she finally no longer asked any further questions, the Prince's had already become thirsty from all the talking. He had really underestimated Anna's thirst for knowledge, if it went on like this, it wouldn't be long before he didn't have anything left that he could teach her.

Especially when Roland had asked her about her progress in math, she just replied, "Until now it was quite simple, and now that I've come to the topic of equations and matrices, they seem to be fascinating.

Simple and fascinating... Roland suddenly felt that the gap between person-to-person was too great, how long has it been? One week from learning simple elementary math until she came to equations and matrices and next it would be differentiation and integration. Back at his school, Anna would definitely have been an intimidating top student.

Moreover... a beautiful bookworm.

Roland looked at the woman who was reading the book, getting spellbound by what he saw. She had carefully arranged her hair over her forehead, but other hair strands had fallen over her cheek. Seeing this Roland could not stop himself from stretching out his index finger, gently stroking the hair behind her ear.

Feeling his finger, Anna turned her head, looking at Roland, with a smile all over her face. Her lake like pupils had no longer their peaceful expression. Instead, they were full of ripples. Staying so

close to each other, until Anna opened her mouth trying to say something, but she was only able to move her lips, no sound could be heard. But Roland was still able to read her lips.

“Right now Nightingale isn’t here.”

The meaning of the sentence was very clear and Roland thought that it was stupid to pretend that he didn’t understand her. The whole room was silent, letting him faintly hear her breathing and the speeding up of her heartbeat.

Roland could no longer stop himself, he became drawn towards her lips, Anna instead closed her eyes, and her cheeks gained a rosy touch. Being so near to her, Roland could smell the fragrance of her body and then finally, their lips gently kissed.

Getting lost in the soft touch, the time seemed to stand still, making it impossible for him to tell how long it was until they separated.

Not giving him a chance to say anything, Anna stood on her tiptoe, joining their lips once more.

“Hey, hey!” Mystery Moon sat cross-legged on her bed, deep in meditation with her eyes clothed, her hands held high, forming a circle with her thumb and index finger.

“Have you turned mad?” Lily who was wrapping a towel around

her wet hairs asked as she frowned.

“I’m thinking of myself as a particle,” she said, opening her eyes. “I’m a particle,” and she then pointed at Lily. “You’re a particle!”

The latter gave her a supercilious look and got into the soft bed.

“Oh, no again,” Mystery Moon sighed, “I truly think of everything as a particle, so why can’t I evolve like Anna?”

“But you don’t believe it,” Lily explained.

“I do believe it!”

“You do not believe,” she shook her head, “you can deceive others, but you can’t fool yourself... even so it isn’t an excellent reason, but I think that regardless of what the Prince says Anna believes everything he says, without questioning it. Of course, there is also the point that she is much smarter than you. This is the main reason why she was able to evolve her magic and gain access to new abilities.”

“...”

“In other words, don’t think any further about it, instead give your mind some peace and quiet.” Lily said and patting the place beside herself.

“Don’t you want to get stronger powers?” Mystery Moon asked disbelievingly, “Furthermore, I also want to do something for the Prince, ah.”

“I should evolve my magic so that I can let my food preservation last longer?” She yawned, “No, thank you. Besides, why do you want to do more work for him? Men are fickle and ruthless people; you only have to take Echo as an example.”

“Even so you say you aren’t interested, but with the exception of Leaves, you are the most attentive and serious one during class,” Mystery Moon muttered.

Lily took her pillow and threw it against Mystery Moon’s face, “Let, me, sleep!”

Chapter 142 - Mine Cart

Since the day he had conquered the Longsong Stronghold, half a month had already passed, and the five noble families of Longsong Stronghold had by now all already delivered the needed people and supplies to Border Town.

After the creation of the Ministry of Agriculture was completed, the new spring had finally begun, which was the first step for Roland's farming revolution. The serfs who already saw the dawn to their life as free people, started to work filled with motivation. The scene where someone had to use the whip to encourage the serfs to work basically disappeared in the area South of the Redwater River. The serfs who were lazy discovered that even though no one came to 'encourage' their speed, the officers of the Town Hall still came to control their work with their strange measuring tools. It was clear that the Lord didn't care about the harvest of one or two fields, the only one who should care for their crops were the serfs who were working for their own future.

Even so, the quality of the officers of the Ministry of Agriculture wasn't so outstanding, they had already thoroughly comprehended the distribution according to work principle, so Roland requested of them that they unceasingly repeated these contents to the serfs. To strengthen the indoctrination effect, as well as to satisfy the Prince's own feeling, the shore at the Redwater River was filled with red banners. Which read "Labor is the only way to get rich," "Working hard brings honor and glory," "Change your destiny by working hard" and so forth.

Of course, these measures weren't possible without taking any objections, for example, Barov was the first to stand up and

complain about it.

“Your Royal Highness, something like this is meaningless, the vast majority of the serfs aren’t even able to read. Even if they could, they don’t care about the text written on the banners. These people are just uneducated and ignorant, for some even the whip doesn’t work, so what can you expect of some unfathomable and mystery text.”

Roland ‘s answer, however, was quite simple: “Those banners are not meant for them.”

“So why do you want to set up these banners?” Hearing this answer, the assistant minister showed a very confused expression.

“To create a living example.”

He had never thought that serfs were stupid and unchangeable. It was true that they were uneducated, but that didn’t mean that they couldn’t think. Greed and interest will drive even a stupid person, that’s was simply human nature. So, if the implementation of the Ministry of Agriculture seemed to have little effect in the beginning, it would still leave a primer in their hearts, just like a seed, it would eventually begin to grow. When the first of the serfs were promoted to freemen, and when they used the harvested crops as an exchange for money to buy beautiful clothing, fine food, and even robust and warm brick houses, the often time repeated slogan would soon come back to their mind and become a reality which would burn itself deep into their hearts.

As for the banner at the shore, it was for the time that the universal education system would bear its first fruits.

By only relying on their own hands to get rid of poverty, becoming an official member of Border Town, even more than the native inhabitants, this was the power of hard work.

By comparing it, they could all feel the gap between them, and their only chance to close it is by taking the initiative to pursue him. Like this, the individual efficiency would rise to its highest level.

Iron Head stood at the tunnel entrance of the mine, waiting for the delivery of a new ore.

Since the Months of Demons, after he was nearly cooked by the high temperature of the steam, he never dared to stand so near to the black machine ever again.

Fortunately, there was the angelic like Miss Nana in Border Town. Whenever Iron Head touched his healed cheeks, his heart was filled with warm emotions. During his deluded and panic-stricken moments, he had even suspected that Miss Nana was one of the devil's minions, but that was clearly a desecration of herself. So, after the winter, he deliberately raised two salted fish and a wild boar leg and delivered them to the Pine Family.

To his surprise, Titus Pine was a Viscount, but unlike the other

aristocrats who always held their nose high in the air, he openly accepted his apology. This was the first time that Iron Head felt that not all of the nobles were all ruthless people.

“Old Iron,” shouted a miner who was covered in dust while he came running out from the tunnel, “the rope has already been fastened.”

“All right,” he exclaimed and turned in the direction of the steam engine, “Everyone clear the area! Frank, first you have to lift up the green lever, then you press the red lever! If you make a mistake, I’m going to twist off your head!”

“Rest assured, Old Iron, I know what I’m doing!” Frank shouted back.

After Nils was accepted into the First Army, it was now Iron Head who was in charge of the operation of the steam engine. During the first few days Frank had often made mistakes with the order, which had even caused one of the pipes to burst, so every time he made a new mistake he would get beaten up. Fortunately, His Royal Highness did not care about this matter, not only did he immediately send people to replace the damaged part, he didn’t even make them pay for the destroyed part. Originally, Iron Head had already formed a plan to confiscate their monthly payment in case of something happening.

With the opening of the intake valve, the steam engine released a majestic white cloud of gas and the main wheel began to slowly turn, moving the capstan and stretching the hemp rope straight.

“Don’t let your spirits wander! Look at the hemp rope, look at it carefully!” Old Iron shouted.

Now, in addition to the steam engine, the transportation of the ore in the mine tunnel had also changed.

His Royal Highness had ordered artisans to create many wooden railroad ties, which then were laid along the whole of the mine’s tunnel. Afterward two long wooden sticks were also placed on the wooden railroad ties, which at first glance it looked like a wooden ladder.

His Royal Highness had called it a wooden rail transportation system, which is a very convoluted name. Even so, it doesn’t seem to be too complicated, but together with the wooden ladder, it also came with a special miner’s cart! That cart is really something. Usually, we needed three to four days to transport the ore, but the steam engine can pull several carts out in just a moment’s breath.

Iron Head had precisely observed this four-wheel miner’s cart. It could run on the wooden tracks and was made from top to bottom completely out of iron. Using so much iron should have cost a lot of money. The key reason that it could move on those thin sticks of wood without falling laid in the way of its construction. The inside edge of the wheel was larger than the rest, fixing it firmly on the rail. On top of the wheels there stood a boxy iron pot, which had on its end and beginning each a small hole where they could be tied together with a hemp rope.

He couldn't help himself from admiring His Royal Highness' wisdom, with such a simple design, he had made the transporting of the ore so much easier. Before his invention, it was the transportation of the ore, which was the most time-consuming labor.

However, this system also wasn't perfect, for example, just after five days of usage, there were already two wooden rails which had been crushed under the weight, and it didn't take much time until others followed after them. Later, His Royal Highness had wrapped all the rails in a thin layer of iron, somewhat improving the durability of the rails.

In addition to the problems with the tracks, the mine also had a rope break by accident, which still haunted Iron Head until this day. According to the regulations, they should only drag four mine carts out at the same time. But on that day, the miners were unusually quick, and because of this, they had linked six mine carts together. During the first half of the transport everything went well, but then suddenly broke one of the hemp ropes. The rebound of the half arm-thick rope was so powerful that the miner who got hit by the rope got several ribs broken. The mine carts instead slid down from the trail and knocked several of the miners off their feet, crushing their legs under it.

Fortunately, Iron Head who had encountered such an accident himself instantly knew what to do. He immediately organized some miners who help him to transport the injured men to the home of the Viscount. He was aware that as long as they still had some life left in them, Miss Nana would be able to heal them as if nothing had ever happened.

“Old Iron, the mine carts are out!” shouted a man who was responsible for overlooking the mine entrance.

Hearing this, Iron Head shouted his next orders, “Frank, wait ten breath and only then should you shut down the steamer, pay attention to the order!”

“Understood!”

After the four mine carts, had slowly stopped at the end of the track, Iron Head went over to record the results of their harvest. The first two carts were filled with a reddish-brown stone, iron ore, which was also the same kind of mineral which was found the most in the mine, the third cart was filled with grayish stones with hints of yellow, which should be copper. But when Iron Head came to the fourth cart, he got rooted on the spot immediately, in it was a kind of ore he had never seen before: They were of a dark brown, but when the sunlight fell on them, they sprinkled in a dark metallic luster.

These stones are clearly an unknown mineral, Iron Head shook his head, the Northern Slope Mine is so large and has so many branches; it's normal that we would find inexplicable things in it. So, he just drew a cross on his paper, giving the signal to send the carts further into the warehouse. As for the pile of black stone, whether it would be directed to the furnace or not, had nothing to do with him.

Chapter 143 - Migrants

The sailboat coming from Longsong Stronghold slowly docked at the pier of Border Town.

After the gangway was lowered, the people on the ship began to walk down the gangway while carrying all kinds of bags. For most of them, it was the first time that they had set foot on this strange land, so they appeared to be somewhat at a loss by what they saw, but the sailors behind them urged them to move further and disregard their uneasy feelings.

When the crowd began to push forward, a middle-aged woman's foot accidentally slipped. Her body became so unbalanced that she was already falling over the gangway. However, another woman quickly stepped ahead and caught the middle-aged woman's wrist, stopping her fall.

"Thank... thank you," the rescued woman's chest was still rising and falling quickly, showing her lingering fear as she said thank you several times.

The other woman, however, just cheerfully waved her hand, indicating that a thank you wasn't necessary.

Standing on the pier and waiting for the arriving travelers was Ferlin Eltek. he immediately saw that the skillfully acting woman was Irene, his beloved wife. She wore a white dress, and her long hair was coiled up on top of her head; she always looked beautiful and refined.

The knight was no longer able to suppress his excitement. The moment Irene finally set foot on the pier, he immediately began to quickly approach her, forcing the poor woman who was still clinging on to her away from her while totally disregarding the shouts of the people around him. Getting approached so unexpectedly, Irene became shocked, but the moment she recognized that it was Ferlin who had hugged her, she fell into his arms.

“When I heard the news of the Duke’s defeat, I got really scared. And when I later tried to meet you in Longsong Stronghold, I never got the chance,” Irene immediately began to speak, “Fortunately, you are safe now.”

“I was imprisoned in the dungeon of the Lord ‘s castle, and it was impossible for the guards to let you in,” Ferlin explained as he let go of his wife. “How was your time during the last half month, was it okay?”

“...” For a moment she didn’t give him an answer but then she quietly said, “I left the theater.”

Ferlin immediately understood the meaning behind his wife’s words. During the time when he was still the First Knight in the Western Territories, only the Duke dared to lay his hands on her body. However, when he had become His Royal Highness’ prisoner, the men in Irene’s theater group no longer had to hide their malicious intents. They were only waiting for the right opportunity to assault her. So if she had still gone to the theater to work, it would be the same as sending a sheep into a tiger’s den.

“That does not matter, I got a job here, and the salary also isn’t low.” Ferlin tried to comfort her, “Let us first go home. There, we can talk in peace.”

“Home?” Irene was clearly surprised, “We do not have to live separately?”

Usually, the prisoners who weren’t killed during the fight and who weren’t bought free were mostly used as coolies. These prisoners were packed in bunches and had to live in tents or barracks, laying on the ground which was only covered with straw. At the same time, the families of such prisoners weren’t treated any better. The women had to live in special camps, where they also had to sleep on the floor. During the time the men worked, the women had to clean up the men’s homes and wash their laundry.

Thinking of this, Ferlin got a warm feeling within his heart. At the farm near the Longsong Stronghold, Irene at least had her own spacious room with a comfortable and soft bed. Yet, she still chose to come to Border Town on her own. Even though she knew that she had to live with other women in a small house or tent and would have to do forced labor every day she didn’t flinch.

“I am now a teacher.” in one hand he took Irene’s luggage and with the other he grabbed her hand. They walked side by side in the direction of the “New Civilization” district, “As a teacher, I get my own house for free.”

To tell the truth, when he had first heard the teachers’ treatment

from the Prince, he hadn't expected too much. As a prisoner, having his own room could be seen as good. Even if the room had leaks where the wind or the rain could come through, it would still be a good living area after repairing it himself. Thinking of this, the actual result was totally unexpected for him; he had never thought that the assigned houses for the teachers would be so... regular.

Entering the new district, the streets suddenly become spacious, and the ground became covered with gray gravel. The stones on the ground were smooth and flat and even after walking on them for a long while, their feet wouldn't hurt. At first, Ferlin didn't understand the reason for all of this; this was clearly a waste of manpower and the masons' time. He didn't understand the reason for it until he saw rainwater flowing along the gaps in the stones sinking into the ground on a day with heavy rain. The rainwater was lead into drainage ditches on both sides of the road. In Longsong Stronghold, every time when it rained, the streets became muddy and were covered with puddles, so the new streets in Border Town were many times better.

Irene, who was taking in her surroundings, showed a puzzled expression and asked, "Here all the houses seem to be new, are you sure you went the right way?"

"Yes, my dear, we're almost there."

Two corners later, Ferlin Eltek paused in front of a two-story brick house with Irene, "We're here."

"Where?" She turned around twice, only to see that her husband

was still looking at the house directly in front of them. Not daring to ask aloud, she covered her mouth, “Is the whole house our home?”

“Of course not,” Ferlin laughed. “This is the teacher's building, our home is in the middle of the second floor, now let us step inside.”

Taking the key out of his pocket to open the door, Ferlin pulled his wife by her hand into the new home. Their home contained a central hall, two bedrooms and two auxiliary rooms, which were freely available for them. Although the rooms were small, it was still surprisingly comfortable. Whether it was the central hall decoration or the bedroom layout, everything felt quite refreshing. And now with Irene at Ferlin's side, the house was now even more perfect.

“Heavens, are you sure you were taken as a captive?” Irene couldn't stop herself as she ran from one room to another, carefully looking at everything. She was as excited like a small child, “Will we actually live here?”

“Well, of course.” Ferlin answered happily and took some bread and cheese from the cupboard and placed them on the table. “You didn't eat anything on board right? Let us first fill your stomach, I will have to go out to work later.”

“Right, you are a teacher now,” Irene ran back to her husband, “do you have to teach the children of the nobility?

"No, not the nobles, rather, I have to instruct His Highness' citizens."

"Citizens?" Irene couldn't believe what she had heard, "teach them what?"

Deciding that an example would be better than his explanation, he took a book from the table and gave it to his wife, "I have to teach them how to read and write. This was given to me by His Highness, my... 'teaching material'"

Even so, he had chosen to become a teacher, but he was still worried that he would be unable to do the job. After all, normally it was always a white-haired old man who served as teacher. However, His Royal Highness' attendant had said that he should just teach according to the teaching materials. Looking at this so-called textbook, he realized that the concept of learning how to read and write could also be refined to such a degree.

From the teaching method to the course's contents, everything was written down. On the first page, there was also a list of dozens of frequently asked questions by novice teachers, such as, "How to become a good teacher? How to awaken the student's interest in learning? How to test the effectiveness of one's teaching?" The answers were always short and easy to understand, giving the reader the feeling of having learned something new. Without realizing it himself, Ferlin had already been attracted to the book, even before the start of his career.

Irene was also clearly such a case, from early on she had lived in the theater and had read many books and the scripts for plays.

Ferlin had lamented more than once that with his wife's face and intelligence, if she had been born into an aristocratic family, her name would have certainly been known as an outstanding woman.

After turning a few pages, Irene suddenly raised her head and asked, "Previously you said... that the teachers are paid quite well?"

"20 silver royals a month, and an annual raise of five."

"There is also no theater here, right?"

"No... there," Ferlin hesitated, he had already guessed his wife's idea.

Sure enough, the other side closed the book and laughingly said, "Then it's decided, I will also become a teacher, Honey, just like you."

Chapter 144 - True Thoughts

Near the North Slope Mine, at the furnace back yard.

Nightingale picked up the glass which laid on the table and raised it near her eyes to take a closer look. The translucent crystal glass sparkled in the light and not even a little bit of discoloration could be seen.

She knew that this cup was known as the Crystal Cup; the firing process and the formula had always been the royal alchemist's confidential information. The value of such cups like the one she held in her hands were measured in gold royals. Such crystal glassware was only used together with silver tableware; they served as an opportunity for powerful nobles or wealthy businessmen to show off their wealth.

But now, these crystal containers were gathered from inside the whole palace and were about to be melted into their raw state.

"Your Highness, you can't burn these cups, they are worth several gold royals!" Nightingale exclaimed.

"I have no time to study how to turn sand into a colorless glass, so this was the only way I could get it." Roland took another beautiful cup and threw it into the cauldron formed from Anna's black fire. Seeing this cup, Nightingale remembered that the Prince had used it to drink ale out of it during their afternoon tea sessions before the start of the Months of Demons and during the welcoming party for her sisters.

Due to the stable high temperature, the glass inside the pot soon began to melt, turning into a sticky paste.

“Do you get glass... by burning sand?” Anna asked. “Are they made out of the same substances?”

“Well, the main ingredients are similar, but in the sand, there are a lot of impurities. The glass created by burning natural sand is partially brown or green most of the time, which doesn’t meet the required standards.”

“So with other words, crystal clear glass is created out of pure sand?”

Hearing this question, Roland had to smile. “You can think of it like that. I already put this knowledge in the book, so you will see it again later. Those small balls decide what matter looks like.”

Whatever, I don’t understand it anyway... Nightingale thought uninterested, the color of the glass doesn’t affect the function of its container, ah. Furthermore, you aren’t even using them as drinking glasses, so why do you insist on using clear crystal cups? Asking this herself, she went to Anna and took a look at the remolded glassware.

Although they were still transparent and crystal clear, their new appearance and their former form of cups were completely different.

Some looked like a tube, with a round bottom and a thin and long body. The other ones looked like bottles with the body of a kettle, but the bottleneck was only thumb-sized.

The strangest thing was a tube that was bent like a horseshoe but with no seals on either side of it.

Not understanding their function, Nightingale asked, “What are you going to do with these crystal glasswares?”

“I won’t use them. They are for the alchemist who will later come to Border Town,” Roland used a rod to stir within the melted glass.” They can use these vessels to extract acids and alkali chemicals; I need those chemicals to produce new weapons.”

Acids? Alkali Chemicals? Nightingale blinked confusedly with her eyes, completely unable to understand what he was talking about. This kind of feeling made her depressed. But if she asked one question after another, she would seem to be ignorant, and Nightingale really didn’t want to expose this side of herself to Anna, so she tried to focus on their conversation. This was the only way she could understand what they were talking about.

“How do you want to lure alchemists to Border Town? Even Longsong Stronghold has no Alchemy Workshop. You have to go to Redwater City to find some alchemist, and I also heard that their pay is even higher than that of ministers. It will be hard to recruit them with gold royals alone.”

"You actually know a lot," Roland replied with a smile, "That's right. I have already sent people on their way to Redwater City; I'm awaiting their answer in around two weeks. But I don't try to recruit them with the help of gold royals. Instead, I offered to reveal some secrets of alchemy to them. As for if I am able to recruit them or not, we will see, but at least I tried it."

The praise in the first part of His Royal Highness' explanation immediately dispelled Nightingale's depressed mood, so she happily went to the center of the yard and picked up one of the pastries placed on a round table and stuffed it into her mouth.

Since Roland would now spent most of his time staying at the experimental site during the afternoon, the tea session had also moved from the castle backyard to the Northern Mountain Slope.

On the round table there were the special snacks the chef had created under Roland's instructions.

For example, this is called steamed stuffed bun-its crust was made out of wheat flour, but she didn't know the kind of method they had used to make it so incomparably soft. It was wrapped around a meatball, and when she bit into it, her mouth was filled with juice... in that way, it wasn't like bacon, which was hard to swallow. As long as one bit into it, it was the perfect fusion of minced meat and meat stock.

After happily eating it, Nightingale put one finger after another into her mouth and sucked them clean. While sitting on the couch with a full stomach and a worry-free heart, Nightingale was suddenly overcome with a tired feeling.

Can it be that I have become more and more lazy as of late?

Her body was sprinkled by the afternoon sun, surrounding her with warmth just like water. The rustling sound of leaves created by the spring breeze calmed her heart. She took off her shoes, rolled her legs under her body and laid down sideways.

This perspective allowed her to directly look at the back door of the calcining room, which had an extra curtain in front of the door. The curtain was most probably only for her so that she couldn't secretly enter the room. Thinking of this, Nightingale felt it was quite funny, the wall separating it from the backyard was well and good, but in the end, it didn't matter. After all, she could just go through the ground. She had also once entered the mysterious room, even standing quietly beside him during the production process, but she still didn't take the finished gunpowder.

However, the other side still thought that she didn't know anything about it, but in the end, he didn't know that it was he who was being kept in the dark.

After moving her head, Nightingale was able to look at Anna.

She was holding a recently melted down cup in her hands and spoke with a serious and focused expression to His Royal Highness.

Towards this talented woman with a common family background, Nightingale's heart only had feelings of admiration.

She and her sisters were able to escape from their fate of homelessness and were freed from the torture of the demonic bite largely because of Anna. If she hadn't changed the view of how the Prince looked at the witches, all these positive developments would have never happened.

If His Highness were to ever actually take a witch as his wife, then Anna was almost the only person Nightingale could think of.

Although there was also a trace of expectation in her own heart, Nightingale had chosen to deeply bury it in her heart. She decided that it would be enough for her to be happy as long as she was able to stay with His Highness for most of the time.

But when she closed her eyes, she couldn't prevent the pictures from appearing in her head.

Roland stood in the King's Palace in front of the throne as the new King. He was wearing a golden crown and was holding a scepter in his hand. Then he began to move toward the castle terrace, where he showed himself to the crowd, accepting their admiration and cheers.

The whole time was a woman walking and standing at his side; she was wearing a white satin skirt and had to be Anna. Just like the king, she also wore a golden crown, but her face was hidden behind a veil. She raised her hand and waved to the people with a smile.

During the entire time, Lightning was drawing circles above them, letting rose petals rain down on them, and from the king's clock tower in the distance, a melodious bell toll could be heard.

On both sides, Nightingale could see her sisters standing, shouting their blessings and applauding.

She could feel how her body was slowly overwhelmed by sleepiness and her consciousness became hazier with each passing second.

Roland finally turned into the direction of the woman beside him, lifted her veil and slowly moved his face towards her lips.

The final scene of her vision become very blurred. When the veil was taken away, Nightingale saw that the woman standing there with closed eyes as if in a trance... was herself.

She tilted her lips upwards and fell asleep.

Chapter 145 - Searching For Traces, Finding The Cause (Part 1)

When Theo entered the tavern, his nose was immediately assaulted by a sultry and moist odor mixed together with the smell of the alcohol.

Under the dim light, he could see a group of men with their sweaty and bare upper bodies left exposed. They sat around the table at the center, pouring one cup after another of the cheap beer into their mouths, all the while loudly laughing and talking with one another. Then there was maid dressed in revealing clothes brought them all a new round of beer.

After looking around the place for a while, he finally found the goal of his coming to this place. A young man was sitting in the corner, which also happened to be the most hidden place in the whole tavern. The only noticeable part of him was the withered wild rose which he had put on the table in front of him.

After discovering the man, Theo went to bar, first getting a cup of beer for himself. While slowly tasting the bitter flavor of the beer, he discreetly screened the room to see whether there were any other eyes that showed any interest to the little man. The result was very satisfactory, although there would occasionally be some people that would look at the corner, most of them were unintentional movements. Only one man, sitting at the central table, was constantly keeping watch over the corner trying to mask it by drinking his beer.

One person as a contractor, one person as a lookout, the typical

method used by shady street rats, this was also identical of Theo's knowledge.

"Once more cup," he shouted to the bartender, "with ice."

"Sir, for a beer on the rocks you have to pay double," the bartender reminded him.

Hearing this, Theo threw a silver royal in his direction, "The more ice, the better."

Holding his cup with the white mist coming out of it, he went across to the little man, placed his beer on the table so that it swept over the wild rose. The cold beer flowed along the petals, seeing this happen the little man raised his head and looked impatiently at Theo. "Good beer is meant for drinking, not for the table, what madness has befallen you?"

"An offer to the wild rose," Theo teasingly spoke as he took a seat across from the little men. "I've been looking for you for a long time now."

"That only proves that you haven't been looking in the right places," he replied in a raspy voice. "That being the case, as a client... tell me now, what do you want from me? Are you asking for clues, scrounging, redeem lost goods, or do you want to get rid of some stolen good?"

"No, I hope you can help me with spreading a rumor."

“That doesn’t fall into the business area of the Wild Rose’s.” He shook his head.

“No, don’t be so fast to jump to conclusions. As long you get paid with gold royals, you will be surely interested in this,” Theo shook his finger, “I am not one of those laymen youngsters. Occasionally, so to ensure that the prey takes the bait, you first have to lay out the bait, and rumors are the best way to achieve this. There won’t be any evidence left and with this there will be no way to catch you. This is much safer than stealing.”

“That sounds reasonable,” acknowledged the little man, showing a smile, “Have you commissioned anyone else besides the Wild Rose?”

“I completely trust that you can achieve it alone, after all, this is only a small place. Their name also doesn’t sound as elegant, and they also don’t seem to be as capable.”

“The business area here is just too small, so it’s hard to find the right business, the competition within Silver City is vicious.” He picked up the rose, shook it, and when it was dry he put it into his pocket, “Tell me, what rumor do you want us to spread for you?”

“Some news about the witches,” Theo laughed, “An organization with the name of Witch Cooperation Association has found the Holy Mountain, they were also able to get rid of the pain during the demon’s bite, gaining eternal peace.”

“Bro, this news is...” the little man smacked his lips, “Really outdated. Although I will rarely step away from trying to scam someone, your gossip should at least be a little believable. Let me guess, in case you aren’t trying to abduct a witch, then it sounds like you want to ensnare the church, which is the same as just waiting to be sent to the gallows by a group of judges, so I think it should be the first option... “showing a vulgar smile, “Unfortunately, as far as I know, most of the witch-hunters who’ve wanted to catch a witch by now are all already dead. Even though they were all carrying a God’s Stone of Retaliation on them, those women, after all, aren’t just some idiots.”

“Why shouldn’t it be believable?” Theo asked curiously.

“An organization formed by witches would be as flashy as the moon during the night. If it were true, the church would undoubtedly flock to it. So, if I were a witch, I would naturally never go to such a place, in case the news was a fake, then there would be no reason for me to go. As for getting rid of the demon’s bite, my man, are you serious? The witches are the Devil’s messenger, even the witches themselves would snort disdainfully at hearing such a pack of lies.”

“Then come forth according to this statement,” Theo disagreed.

“In the end, the customer always has the final say,” the young man just shrugged his shoulders, “It doesn’t matter to me, just don’t come to me afterward and say that I didn’t warn you. This job will cost you twenty gold royals.”

“One-time payment?”

“Yes, the Wild Rose does not take deposits, nor anything other than money.” He spread his arms, “this business relies entirely on sincerity.”

Theo sighed, but then he took out a small money bag from his pocket. Turning it around and letting nineteen gold royals fall onto the table, he then took another moneybag from his belt and put another one hundred silver royals on the table and pushed everything to in front of the young man. The latter just checked the authenticity of one of the gold royals and afterward swept everything into his own bag.

“Will the news reach the witches’ ear?”

The moment he had received his money, the little man’s face became a lot friendlier, “The Wild Rose has accepted your commission, it’s nearly impossible that we cannot get the accepted jobs done. Just like I had previously said, the competition within Silver City is cruel. In case we would ever try to deceive our customers, or if anything was to happen to them, our reputation would definitely fall. If you don’t want to rush back towards the West and wait for someone else to take the bait, you can always stay here for the next few days, it won’t be long before you will hear the news spread all over the place.

“Of course, only for as long as they are willing to speak about it. I’ll keep it short and wish you success on your hunt, and if you ever manage have catch one, don’t bring them to the Church. You can make more money by selling them to the aristocrats. And if you cannot find the right person or you’re too afraid of being found by

the Church, you can always come back to us, we will only take a small introduction fee.”

With this offer, the young man stood up, took the bag and left the tavern. It didn't take long before the person responsible for keeping the young man safe also stood up and left. In the next fifteen minutes, Theo just waited and drank his cup of beer, then belched and also left the pub.

With this, the task given by His Highness has finally come to an end, he thought. Fallen Dragon Ridge, Redwater City, Silver City, he had visited them all. Always searching for the local street rats, letting them spread the news up to the last corner of the city. There were always such hidden organizations, even the King's City was no exception to this. Such organizations were able to reach places and spread news, he could never contact using the legal ways. How successful they were only depended on how much money the customer had already offered.

The only difficulty in this job was to find the contractor, he had to say, as an outsider it was quite difficult to get their trust. Only if he used the right phrase would they try to talk him, but to receive the sentence, he had already had to pay at least five gold royals. Theo lamented within his heart, if I hadn't already had similar experiences in King's City, I am afraid I would never have been able to leave the Fallen Dragon Ridge.

On the way back to his inn, he noticed that there was something not quite right.

Someone is tracking me.

Although the other party was very subtle, as a professional bodyguard, Theo immediately became aware of the other's existence. He pulled out the dagger at his waist, and turned at the next corner, entering an unknown alley.

Are they from the Wild Rose? He had purposely turned his money bag inside out when he had paid the nineteen gold royals, this way he wanted to avoid the other side becoming greedy. In general, hundreds of silver royals weren't enough for them to go after an already accepted customer.

He pressed his back against the wall, counting the ever-approaching footsteps. The moment the other person was about to pass by the ally he fiercely rushed out from his hideout, instantly pressing his dagger against the unknown person's neck.

“Don’t move!” Theo lowly hissed.

But he would have never expected that the other one would just turn into fog, disappearing.

It’s a witch! The moment he realized it and wanted to shout out, was the moment he received a severe blow to the back of the neck. Immediately becoming dizzy then losing all of his strength and unable to keep himself from falling to the ground.

Chapter 146 - Searching For Traces, Finding The Cause (Part 2)

When Theo regained his consciousness, he could still feel a stabbing pain from the back of his neck.

Damn, that brute of a woman had hit him really hard. He opened his eyes and tried to move, only to discover that his hands were tied behind his back and his legs were tied to the legs of the chair he was sitting on.

“He woke up,” suddenly the voice of a woman could be heard.

“What is your name?” One person stepped in front of him and raised his chin. “I suggest that you do not lie, or tomorrow you will already have become just another floating corpse in the moat.”

Theo had to blink to see clearer, the woman in front of him was wearing a veil, and her body was shrouded in a robe, apparently, she didn’t want him to be able to recognize her appearance.

“Theo,” he answered truthfully, at the same time he secretly looked around.

It was a narrow room, and his surrounding was covered in dust and pieces of plaster from a broken statue, even though it was once complete, now merely one-half of it was left. The accumulated dust and plaster had already begun to turn brown as if it had already been abandoned for a long time. The room was without windows,

so no sky could be seen and he could only speculate on how late it was. The only light in the room came from an oil lamp hanging on the wall.

“From the Fallen Dragon Ridge to Silver City, such a long way,” continued the woman in a cold voice, “Why are you looking for us?”

“I am not looking for you, it’s the Witch Cooperation Association who is looking for you.”

“What is an Association?”

“It’s a group of witches just like you. They had entrusted me with the task of spreading their news.”

“Nonsense,” the woman snapped, “I do not know where you had heard their name, but they are located far to the East, in the Seawind Region. Do you think that just by randomly throwing names into the room we would believe you?” The Women drew a knife from her waist and Theo had to discover that it was the knife that he had previously used. “I’ll give you one last chance, don’t challenge my patience!”

“What I said was the truth!” He stated in a loud voice, he wanted to continue to shout, but in the end, he didn’t dare, so he said with a suppressed voice, “They had originally intended to go into the Impassable Mountain Range, trying to find the Holy Mountain, unable to find the Holy Mountain, they had to settle down in Border Town, only to discover that the symptoms of the demon’s bite had disappeared. When they realized this, they naturally

wanted to save other witches, I swear I did not lie!"

"Then why would they send you?"

"Cause I helped them, I helped them when one of their members was chased by the Church's Army of Judges, I helped her by distracting her pursuers. Their mentor is called Cara, and there are also Wendy and Scroll, they asked me to go! "

After listening to his explanation, the masked woman turned silent, she put the dagger back to her waist and stepped behind him. Soon, Theo could hear how the two women whispered behind his back.

Fledglings, he commented in his heart, even though the two of them act like criminals, it is still clear that they are entirely new to interrogating.

During an interrogation, it is absolutely taboo to ask questions that had only one answer, in the case that they didn't get their answer, the questioner only had the choice to kill or not to kill? If they decide to kill, they will lose any further possibility of receiving any more information, if they didn't kill, it's equivalent to losing their threat of dying. This would severely damage the interrogator's position of power, and the effectiveness of the next threat would be substantially reduced.

If he were the interrogator, he would start the torture with the fingers, for every lie one finger would be cut off. So even if there were an error in judgment, it would become a big problem. Under

this threatening atmosphere the enemy's heart would quickly collapse, but without professional training, it would be very tough to carry out such a trial.

As long as he would show a frightened look, the interrogator would become unsure, which is equally to exposing that they just cannot tell whether he was lying or telling the truth.

And Cara, Holy Mountain, and the Witch Cooperation Association were reliable and genuine information, which would further strengthen the persuasiveness of his information.

It didn't take long before the masked woman appeared once more in front of him, "When was it that they entered the Western Territory?"

"Two or three months before the Months of Demons, and directly after the end of winter, they returned to the town, claiming that they had found the Holy Mountain.

"How many people are they?"

"Up to 40? I'm not sure of it, in addition to Cara, there are almost no other witches who decided to show themselves," Theo decided to add another bit of information, "Cara the Snake Witch, have you heard of her? She has the ability to summon magical snakes, one of them is called 'nothingness'. With her, she can quickly erase every toxin. I have seen it myself, it was very powerful."

“You actually do not fear the witches?” The woman’s voice seemed to be a bit puzzled.

“Why should I be afraid, the witches are very... beautiful, they don’t possess claws like demonic beasts, and furthermore they don’t hurt ordinary people. If I feared them, I would have never gone so far to spread the news.”

“If someone went to Border Town, how could they contact them?”

“Some of them can naturally see magic, so if there is a witch, they will find her.”

“Shadow, what do you think?” The masked women looked into the direction behind Theo.

“I’m not sure,” the witch, known as Shadow, hesitated. “Shouldn’t we wait for our sister and then make a decision? She surely will know what to do.”

“All right.” She nodded and took a clean chair, sitting herself in front of Theo.

“Who is your older sister?”

“The guide,” the masked woman’s attitude had softened a lot compared to before. Probably his statement that he didn’t fear the witches, changed her thoughts and feelings a lot, “she will take us

away from here.”

“You will leave? Where will you go to?”

The spoken too just shook her head and didn’t answer.

“You are not a witch from Silver City, right?” Theo continued, “Your accent is not the same as the accent of the King. Silver City was near the capital, so the inhabitants here are proud of imitating the king’s accent.”

She hesitated for a moment, “I... am from the South.”

Witches from all over the Kingdom have gathered here, and soon they will be lead away from here... Theo thought to himself, there is no doubt, they are another witch organization. They are also attracting witches, just like the Witch Cooperation Association had done before. However, in the end, where do they want to go?

At this moment, from outside the sound of footsteps could be heard.

“Sister came back!” Shadow shouted cheerfully. With the creaking sound of the door opening, Theo began to hold his breath.

“Is he the one who has been using the underground channels to spread the news?” The newcomer’s voice was mature and steady. “What have you asked him?”

“What he had said seems to be true.” Began the masked women to explain how she saw the questioning, “He could not have been so clear in his explanation if he had not been in contact with the Witch Cooperation Association.”

“Well, there’s that,” she went by Theo, stepping in front of him. There was a big difference between her and the masked woman, she didn’t hide her face. Her long black hair nearly reached her waist, and she seemed to be around twenty-five years old. Taking her in whole, the most eye-catching part of her were her eyes. Theo discovered that she unexpectedly had golden irises, even standing in the dim light, her eyes were still clearly visible just like the stars during the night.

Theo had often been at His Highness side, but the unknown woman’s appearance could still be considered as belonging the top category. She had a visible scar over her left eye, beginning at her brow and going down to her cheek. This scar not only did not destroy her beauty but instead added another harsh touch to it. From the first moment that he saw her, Theo felt that this woman was a full-fledged warrior.

“If the Witch Cooperation Association had indeed found the Holy Mountain, they would have never sent people to spread such news.” She shook her head, “This wouldn’t only let the Church getting wind of it and let them arrive, no they would even have to leave Border Town as soon as possible, I’m afraid they would only bring a great calamity over themselves.”

“Then... what should we do?” Shadow asked.

“The ship will arrive today at midnight, and you aren’t the only witches, so you will have to leave,” she said without hesitation, “I’ll escort you to the ship. As for the Wi...” The black-haired woman looked at Theo who was still tied to the chair, “Please help me to say hello to Tilly, tell her I’ll be late for a few days and perhaps I’m even be able to bring some more witches with me.”

“You want to go with him to Border Town?” Shadow asked surprised, “But, in case this is a hoax...”

She smiled a little and said full of confidence, “if that were the case, it would be the same as killing oneself.”

Chapter 147 - Missionary Mission

Alicia had never thought that she would one day become a member of a missionary mission.

After all, when the Church sent people on such a mission, the group would always be formed from elite warriors who were also well versed in letters and military tactics, since they would represent the face of the Church the entire time they were away. She was very confident in her fighting skills and her etiquette; it could even be said that she looked like... the whole year I'm constantly moving along the defensive line, always holding and waving my double-edged greatsword, can such a woman be good-looking when she has to go somewhere? Thinking of this, her whole body was covered in a feeling of unease.

The Priestess Mira had said, that they had to go to the western border town of the Kingdom of Graycastle, investigating the case of the royal power housing and shielding some witches. In addition to the Priestess who led the envoy, the group also consisted of ten Judges, one of them being the captain who had given her the cold pill during the defense of Hermes.

But it seemed that even away from the battlefield, he was still constantly wearing his cold face, and just by standing beside him Alicia could feel how the temperature drastically fell.

The Priestess instead was the completely opposite expression, she was already over the age of 40, and had a pair of wise and farseeing eyes. Always telling and laughing about anecdotes of the Church, she clearly had a lot of experience, full of passion for others'

interest but never losing her elegant demeanor as she went. Even in the presence of the Archbishop, her aura wouldn't reduce. More than once, Alicia had heard that she was the likeliest candidate to be the next bishop.

And to the warrioress' surprise, as a public official, Mira's riding skills were not much worse than the skills of the Judges. For the past two days, she had spent most of her time in front of the troops, leading them ever further down the mountain trail, bypassing the forests, cities, and towns, so that she could always keep the horses going at the same speed and try to reduce the physical exertion. This technique was just like that of an experienced long-term rider.

When they left the Hermes boundary and entered the Kingdom of Graycastle, one of the Judges asked, "We aren't going further south?"

"No, the distance between Border Town and where we are is too far, if we take the land route, my buttocks will start to bloom just like flowers." Mira waved her hand disapprovingly, "We will first go eastwards until we reach the Hidden Valley Town, there is a river which flows to Redwater City and from there it won't be much further before we reach Longsong Stronghold."

"When was it that you first joined the Church?" Alicia asked curiously. "Not only do you know all sorts of anecdotes about things that've happened in the Holy City, but you also know a lot about the world at large."

"I joined the Church, twelve years ago, when I was thirty," Mira

replied.

“That’s quite late,” Alicia exclaimed, “as far as I know, the older one is, the more difficult it would become to comprehend the doctrines of God, it is even more shocking that it only took you ten years to be promoted from the rank of a believer to that of a Priestess.”

“Yes, well,” Mira smiled, “This is one of the enchanting aspects of the Church. I, ah, was originally the daughter of a merchant and traveled together with my father through the four kingdoms to sell goods. Goods that are common at some places at other locations are rare and because of this worth much more.

“For example, the price for green coral, when we bought it from local fishermen in the Seawind Region, we could buy them for a price of only twenty to thirty silver royals. We put them into water tanks and transported them the whole way northward to Imperial Palace of the Kingdom of Endless Winter. If the transport was successful and the corals still had their natural color, and were without any broken branches, we could sell them for five or more gold royals. I often thought, it’s obviously that they are the same item, so how can it be that there is such an enormous difference in their value?”

“Because... in some places they are rare?” Alicia suggested.

“At the beginning I thought the same.” Mira nodded in agreement, “But then something happened that changed my view. One noble secretly harbored a witch who was able to control the temperature, after some tests he finally came up with a way in

which he could keep and raise the corals of the Seawind Region in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter. He turned the basement of a house in his garden into a huge pond, setting some skylights into its ceiling, with this he could harvest the corals once a year. His output was ten times more than what my father was able to transport and we were only able to make the journey once a year. So, there were now much more green corals on the market than before. He not only sold them to the palace, but also to other powerful aristocratic families. If the price was only decided by its rarity, the expensive price of green corals should go down.

“But after two years, the palace refused to accept those low-priced green corals, saying that they were counterfeit goods. Not only had my father not cut down on the prices of the green corals, no he had even doubled it. As for the noble with the witch, he became confined by the Church, according to the crime of harboring and kidnapping of a witch he was burned at stake. But I knew that the corals sold by him were no counterfeit products, there was no difference between them and my father’s product.

“Thinking it’s because of the reason that the items are rare, isn’t the wrong idea, but there are many other reasons which also determine the price of goods. Furthermore, this was only one of the simplest examples. Because the Royal Palace thought of the green corals as a symbol of luxury, they artificially set its value to be higher. When more green corals appeared on the market, it would also significantly impact the provisions of the royal family. Therefore at the day of execution, the Queen also celebrated. Don’t you think that these goods are the same as us secular people?”

“Like... what?” Alicia couldn’t follow her thought process.

“Just like the children of royalty and commoners,” Mira spoke without stop. “When they are born, they all get a price attached to them, but this price doesn’t reflect our real value. We are just like those green corals, yet sometimes they can be bought for a low price, but at other places, the price becomes too high to even reach.”

“Too high to be reached... you mean becoming nobility?”

“Nobles are the corals of the Royals Palace of the Kingdom of Eternal Winter,” the Priestess smiled, “when they and we are born there is no difference between us. We both have a pair of hands, a pair of feet, a pair of eyes and a mouth. However, they were artificially classified as beings of the highest value. This inequality isn’t based on their own ability, but on the rule of the royal power. Because of this, I joined the Church. At least in the Holy City, your origin does not limit your value. If we could put the whole continent under the rule of the Holy Church, establishing the so-called Kingdom of God, it would be the case for everyone.

“You are right, that would truly be a good thing!” Alicia wholeheartedly and thought excited. It would be like heaven on earth. If we were able to establish a kingdom under the rule of God. Just like Mira had described it, there would be no difference between the people when they were born, nor would there exist any pariah or slaves.

“A Kingdom of God? Well... do you want to turn all the people into cold-blooded monsters?” The cold-faced captain of the Army of Judges shook the reins of his horse, and joined up with them, “Priestess, how much do you know about the God’s Punishment

Army?"

"Hey, you" Alicia was about to remind him to pay attention to courtesy, but she was already stopped halfway by Mira.

"The God Punishment Army is the gathering of the most powerful warriors of the Church. They also possess the strongest faith, willing to sacrifice themselves, only the brave and fearless members of the Army of Judges can be transformed."

"Them being the most powerful is a good point, that they need to be transformed to be able to join the army is also not bad, but they aren't the most converted of us soldiers, no, they are nothing more than a group of people without any feelings, just like monsters!" After coldly dropping this sentence, he went to his horse and rode it back to the front of his team.

"He is simply a rude one!" Alicia bitterly said, when she had seen him at Hermes, even so, they had to face danger, he was exactly like a general he had to be, both calm and brave. But now... what had happened to him, that he had become such a kind of person?"

"It's okay, he's just not in the mood right now." Mira shook her head. "To build the Kingdom of God, there will be setbacks and sacrifices... but at least we all joined voluntarily."

It was already late when they arrived at the next town, and as missionaries on a mission of the Church they were allowed to rest in the town's church. After everyone had eaten. They all went back to their own room to sleep. Alicia was walking behind the captain,

but when they reached an aisle, she suddenly called out to him.

“Mira is our leader, what was the meaning behind your outbreak during the ride? Did you forget all the rules and regulations of the church?”

After a moment of silence, he asked: “Your name is Alicia, isn’t it?”

“Yes, and just like you, I’m now a captain in the Army of Judge. At the fight during the Month of Demons I had asked you for your name, but you didn’t give me an answer, are you now able to tell me your name?”

“Abrams,” he said with a blank expression, “as to why I did that... do you have any brothers or sisters? ”

“No.” Alicia suddenly remembered that he had said that his brother was a member of the God’s Punishment Army.

“I have. He and I grew up in the Church, we were so close that we would always know what the other was thinking. Later, he accepted the invitation and transferred to the God’s Punishment Army. Since that day I have never seen him again. The presiding judge told me that his transformation was very successful and that he was now out on a special mission of the Church, I was euphoric for him.” He paused, “Until one day, I finally saw him again in the cathedral, I shouted his name, and when he came up to me, I wanted to embrace him. But can you guess what I saw? ” Asking this, Abrams’ face showed for the first time some feelings, pain,

“He acted like a stranger, he didn’t see me at all, he just walked straight past me. Never turning his eyes in my direction, always staring to the front, ultimately acting, unlike a human.”

“...” hearing his story, Alicia could feel a cold chill running down her back, she wanted to shout that he had lied, but when she opened her mouth, no such words could escape.

“The member of the God’s Punishment Army are deprived of their human feelings, they are nothing more than a group of living dead.” He pushed Alicia to the side and walked back to his room, not looking back as he left.

Chapter 148 - The Merchant From King's City (Part 1)

Border Town welcomed the long missed rainy weather, from the dark clouds in the sky, the rains came splashing down onto the earth, hitting the windowsills and the windows creating a loud crackling sound the whole time.

It was reasonable to say that the spring was meant to be a rainy season, both warm and humid. But this year in Border Town, since the end of the Months of Demons, the number of rainy days they've had could be counted on one hand. Fortunately, the farmland was directly beside the river, which made the watering very convenient. Now, due to the heavy rain they received the oppressive air had finally dispersed. So now, as Nightingale opened a window, the room was flooded by the rich fragrance of mother earth.

From afar, you could see the sprouting crops on the other side of the Redwater River. The horizon was covered with endless amounts of green wheat seedlings. Now, washed by the rain, these crops sparkled dazzlingly in contrast to the gray water of the river.

Roland stretched his body and put the pen back into its container.

Seeing that he had finished, Nightingale finally asked, “Did the blueprint turn out well?”

“Well, it is an entirely new weapon, with its fire rate increased by

several times,” Roland said, placing the blueprint on the stack together with more than a dozen of designs. “I’ll call it the rotating rifle. What do you think?”

“You don’t need to show it to me,” Nightingale said, showing an ironical smile. “I wouldn’t understand it anyway.”

“This is just the primary type, if the barrel gets shortened, it will become a revolver, which you can also carry around with you. However, even if it would come in handy to have it, I still first have to solve a missing key piece of technology. But, when the times comes and I can give it to you, you no longer need to fear the Army of Judges coming from the Church.”

“You mean, it will allow an ordinary woman to kill a heavily armed Knight?”

“Not only one, but several,” Roland smirked, “if you’re lucky, then five powerful men also wouldn’t be a problem.”

Nightingale exposed a look full of disbelieving, the moment when he wanted to say something further, a knocking sound could suddenly be heard coming from outside the office.

“Your Royal Highness, Barov’s apprentice who was sent to the capital, came just back, he brought a merchant with him who trades in saltpeter, at the moment the merchant is waiting outside of the castle for you to receive them.”

What apprentice of Barov? When Roland thought about it, only one thing came to mind. Before the attack on the Longsong Stronghold, Border Town's stock of gunpowder was running low, and he had sent some guards to the Fallen Dragon Ridge and Redwater City, hoping to obtain a new source of saltpeter. Barov's apprentice was the last to be sent on his journey, his destination was King's City. After all, they should have all kinds of goods over there, coupled with the approaching summer, this meant the production of saltpeter would certainly be significantly increased.

He had never expected that the last person he had sent out would be the first to come back with good news.

"Bring them to the reception-room, and I'll join them soon," Roland looked out the window at the sky, "And let the kitchen prepare another portion of dessert."

Turning back around, he saw that Nightingale had already disappeared.

But he knew that she was as always at his side.

...

Later when Roland entered the reception-room, the merchant was only just now brought into the room by the guards. She took off her wet cloak and straw hat, then bowed in front of the Prince showing her respect, "I am Margaret Farman, a merchant from King's City, today I'm here to salute you, Your formidable Highness Wimbledon.

Seeing that the merchant was actually a woman, was completely unexpected to Roland. During this era, the traveling routes were much less safe than during the later times. Traveling around one may not only encounter bandits or refugees, but the towns also had many underground forces, not to forget there was still the dangerous wildlife to take into consideration, so seeing a woman working as a merchant was quite rare.

Like Lightning, she had bright blonde hair, but her hair was thicker and longer. She should be around 30 years old, and perhaps because of living a harder life than that of the ordinary people, she already had wrinkles around the eyes and on her forehead. Her skin color was also darker than the Kingdom's people. At first glance, her appearance seemed a little rough. But it was clear that she didn't belong to the Sandpeople, but rather to the people of the Fjord.

"Sit down," the Prince said, motioning that she could take a seat. "You aren't an original citizen of the Kingdom of Graycastle, are you?"

"Why would you ask that?" Margaret smiled.

"The color of your hair, it is a very rare sight to see from people of the mainland. As far as I know, most people coming from the other side of the Vortex Sea have such pretty blond hair, I also know a... an explorer from the Fjords."

"You are very knowledgeable; my hometown is indeed in the

Fjord. But I have already left the Fjords and come to the mainland more than a decade ago. Today I'm living in the capital, and can be considered as a half-citizen of the Kingdom of Graycastle." She paused, "Since it wasn't so long ago that you've left the capital yourself, it is possible that we have already met somewhere before. To be able to live in the same city as Your Highness, I feel very honored."

Sure enough, a successful businessman is splendid at speaking, even knowing that the other side was just flattering him, Roland still got a pleasant feeling. However, right at this moment, he could feel how his right side was suddenly pinched ... uh, this time you didn't need to determine if she was telling the truth or not, Nightingale you're too enthusiastic about doing your duty.

"In the Fjords, being an explorer isn't just a hollow title." Margret continued earnestly, "You may not understand, but the land where the people can survive is very scarce in the Fjords, where the water rises and falls, some islands will be swallowed at high tide. While other islands spew flames and smoke all day long, and they have such a high temperature that even the stone melts, converging all into a dark red river. Only those who open up new channels, or find a new suitable place for people to live, are eligible to get this title, so there aren't many people who proclaim themselves, explorer."

"Haha, not only does she call herself an explorer, she also claims her father to be the greatest explorer," Roland smiled and shook his head, "Well, children, they like to imagine themselves as great people."

“In the Fjord, even the child, will not so easily claim that title,” Margaret frowned up, “did she ever mentioned her father ‘s name?”

Seeing the earnest look on her face, Roland also realized that had he misread the situation, can it possibly be, that for the Seafolk take the title of Explorer as something they believe in spiritually? Is it possible that it cannot be called so casually?

“Her father’s name is Thunder.”

Roland had never expected that the moment he said the name, Margaret’s eyes became big and round, “You know Sir Thunder?”

“No, I only know his daughter. How is it possible that you’ve heard of the name?”

“No one in the Fjords hasn’t heard the stories of him! Sir Thunder, the Twin Dragon Islands and the Shallow Water Island were discovered by him. With this he expanded our living area by almost half. He also painted a detailed map of the east coast and the Shadow Island. Now, every child of the Fjords knows of the deeds of Sir Thunder, he is one of the greatest explorers of the Fjords!”

“But I heard that Thunder seemed to be buried in the sea because of a storm...”

“No, Your Royal Highness, a real Explorer will never fall because

of a storm. He has faced numerous dangers, but in the end, he has always survived. At the moment, Sir Thunder must be somewhere gathering the crew for a new expedition, just like he has always done.

Margaret leaned forward, “Your Highness, would you happen to know where his daughter could be right now?”

Roland was still a little surprised, he had never thought that Lightning’s father was actually so famous. Can it be that her tales which sounded so much like fantasy were all true?

“She lives here in my castle, after the shipwreck, she has kept traveling westwards until she reached Border Town, when I happened to meet her, and I took her in.”

“In your castle?” Margaret was full of expectation. “Can I see his daughter?”

“For now, most probably not,” Roland said, at the moment, Lightning should be flying over the Concealing Forest, looking for the site marked on the treasure map. “She is currently practicing... taking a jungle adventure. But if you plan to stay overnight, you can wait until she comes back.”

“Then I’ll wait and I will talk with her later,” Margaret nodded without hesitation.

“Then we can now discuss business, right?”

"Of course, Your Royal Highness," Margaret answered laughingly, "do not hesitate to speak your mind."

Chapter 149 - The Merchant From King's City (Part 2)

"Are you King's City's biggest saltpeter trader?" Roland directly cut to root.

"No, Your Highness," Margaret was no longer just showing her formal smile, her speech also became much more intimate, "I run all kind of different businesses, from gems to cloth, from inns to taverns. In fact, not even a month ago, I still had nothing to do with saltpeter trading. Only when the original owner of the nitrate field lost all of his reserves and went bankrupt during his visit in my casino, did I have the rights transferred to me as payment."

Not only was she selling all kinds of goods, she even had a firm hold in the service industry... being able to build such a large business empire, in the end, what background did she have? It was well known that if you wanted to open a casino in King's City, with money alone it would be an impossible thing to achieve. Wanting to know if she was telling him the truth, Roland knocked on the table, but Nightingale pinch to the middle of his back left him unsatisfied. Since a pinch like this indicated that Margaret was carrying a God's Stone of Retaliation, making it impossible for her to judge whether the other one was telling a lie or telling the truth.

Wait a moment... since it's impossible for her to observe, why did she pinch me so hard previously?

Roland coughed twice, suppressing his curiosity.

He had heard that some of the merchants from the Fjords had settled down in the Four Kingdoms. Their businesses were so successful that they grew bigger and bigger until they accumulated so much wealth that it became hard to even imagine it. After finally securing some wealth, many merchants were easy marks and were effortlessly swindled out of their gains. Only a few were able to stabilize themselves and put down roots, and reinvest their money successfully into local establishments, forming a relatively stable business union. Can it be that Margaret is one of those big dogs?

This being the case, Roland decided to be direct and straightforward with his request, “I need a large amount of saltpeter, the more, the better.”

“The Western Territory of the Kingdom isn’t a scorching place, especially near the Impassable Mountain Range. Your Royal Highness, do you really need so much saltpeter?” Margaret became curious, “In the eastern outskirts of the kingdom, I have three nitrate fields, enough to supply a middle-sized city of nobles with ice.”

Definitely a big shot, she even has three nitrate fields! Even though, Roland became overjoyed, there was no visible change in his expression, “I’m going to build a cold store in the basement of the castle to store some perishable food. As long as you give me the right price, I’ll take all the saltpeter you can bring.”

“Since you’ve explained it so clearly to me,” she nodded, “I’m willing to transport all of my saltpeter to Border Town, and I will only charge you the typical market price of King’s City, but...”

“But what?”

“I do not want to be paid with gold royals, I already have enough of them to fill up a whole warehouse. I heard that you were in possession of some foreign products, if you used these instead of the gold royals, I would be happy to conclude a deal with you.”

“Strange products?” Roland got rooted, it was the first time that he had heard someone say that he didn’t want any gold royals.

“Yes, well. I heard something about a self-running black iron creation,” Margaret leaned slightly forward, “Your servant said, that with this thing, you only need to ignite a fire and boil water for it to become amazingly powerful. In fact, only after I heard him speak about such a creation did I decide to visit Border Town. Otherwise, directly selling the saltpeter to the nobility around the capital would be much more in line with my interests. After all the transportation distance is many times farther, so I have to bear a significant loss.”

This is really a pleasant surprise, Roland thought. Although I don’t know how Barov’s apprentice caught hold of this line, and in what way he had described the steam engine, but evidently this merchant from King’s City was very interested in it.

How incredible the profits and business potential of industrial products were, was all very clear to Roland. Especially since they could be only created by his own mechanical products. He had already worried about that after Border Town had sold all the ore

and used up all the Duke's coins, that they would have no other business opportunities. But he would never have thought that today, such an excellent opportunity such as this would be put right in front of him.

"So, that was your reason," the prince said. "What you had heard of is called a steam engine. It converts water by boiling it into steam, which can be used as source of power. The principle behind it is very simple, but only we here in Border Town are able to produce it."

"So there exists really such an amazing thing?"

"Of course," Roland answered, "but it is very complicated to manufacture so the price will be quite high. If you are interested, you can go with me to see the machine."

"Extremely interested," she said with excitement.

...

In the North Slope Mine, Margaret saw a large roaring steel monster which pulled several mine carts loaded with minerals out of the mine tunnel, her eyes turned full and round, nearly falling out of their sockets.

"Your Royal Highness, t-this... is incredible." Margaret whispered, feeling overwhelmed,

“Previously I had thought that your messenger had exaggerated, but even in my wildest dreams, I had never thought that he even understated it... I am afraid that even a dozen of people together don’t possess a power such as this... steam engine.”

Wanting to take a closer look, Margaret took a step toward the engine but was stopped by Roland. “The running is very dangerous, don’t get too close to it. Do you see the white gas spraying out of it? Even if you only get hit by a small part of it, it is still enough to burn your skin.”

“Do you only use it to transport ore?” As the noise was too large, she had to step near Roland and shout into his ear.

“In this mine, we are using two, one is used to help the miner transport the ore, while the second one is used for pumping out the water in the mine,” Roland replied, “In fact, until today, Border Town was only able to produce three steam engines. We use them, where they are needed the most. But they can be employed for a broad range of purposes, as you could perhaps imagine. They can replace windmills and waterwheels, to grind wheat. They aren’t affected by rivers or winds, and they don’t need any manpower or animal power. What might interest you, even more, is that they can even be fitted onto a sailing boat, moving the paddles, allowing the ship to move without any sails.”

He knew that their dependence on the wind and its direction was of great significance for the Seafolk. Sure, enough, hearing this Margaret looked with wide-open eyes at Roland, “Just name a price, I will take it with me!”

“That’s out of the question, the mine also relies on it to maintain the production. You can order a few new steam engines and then when you deliver the saltpeter, you can take them with you.”

“What would their price be...?”

Roland lead her away from the entrance of the mine. Being further away from the noise of the machine, it was now much easier to speak. “One steam engine will cost five hundred gold royals,” Roland offered. Even so, the price was a bit exaggerated, being almost equivalent to a knight’s territory annual income. The ore to produce one steam engine cost around twenty gold royals, plus melting costs, labor costs and installation costs it would be another fifty gold royals. However, to get a good price, one always had to have some space for a bargain.

“Then I’ll buy ten steam engines!”

“...” Roland became frozen, ten steam engines were the same as five thousand gold royals! Almost the equal to the five or six years of the Duke Ryan’s savings. Not even trying to bargain, was that the power of a big dog? He cleared his throat, “You’re sure of it? After all, it’s not a small sum, and the machine is also not always available for usage, and even if you bought it, you still have to invest money into it.”

“I know, it’s just like a ship which has to visit the dock every year to clean up the keel of parasites and algae, replacing the sails, ropes and so on,” Margaret did not mind it, ” What later needs to be added, I’ll buy it from you. If it actually becomes impossible to manage by myself, you only have to name a price, and I will pay

you for the craftsmen to maintain and operate the machine.”

Roland closed his mouth, there was only one thought left in his mind, being wealthy really must be nice.

Chapter 150 - Stone Tower

At this moment Lightning was flying somewhere across the Concealing Forest.

In her eyes, it seemed that the world had become smaller. As far as her eyes could see, all the details had faded, only a world made out of pure colors was left. Brown was the earth, gray were the mountains, green the forest and blue the river.

Yet it was this green which occupied an overwhelming majority of her field of view.

And not the bright green of the grass fields in Border Town, here the green was mixed with gray and black, turning it dark and condensed. Whether it was to the West or the North, everywhere she looked, she only saw a dark green, with no end to it in sight. Due to seeing it for such a long time, she slowly developed a feeling of falling. So, from time to time, Lightning had to look up at the sky, to disperse the ever-increasing feeling of discomfort.

Behind her, the overcast black clouds were flowing past very low, enclosing the Impassable Mountain Range and Border Town in rain and fog.

She was now flying over the forest trying to find the remains from four hundred fifty years ago, for her, this was undoubtedly a great adventure. Two weeks ago, when Roland had offered her this task, Lightning immediately accepted this mission. Furthermore, there was a big difference between Cara who thought of the

ancient book as infallible and the Prince. His Highness repeatedly explained to her, that this drawing could only be used as a reference and that the most important part of the search was her safety, it wouldn't matter if she could find the tower or not. This gave the young girl the impression that she would have a great time.

She knew that His Royal Highness was right, even in case that it was Border Town's castle, over the period of more than four hundred years, the plants would have grown almost everywhere and gradually turned into a pile of dust. But she still wanted to find this place, to determine the location of the hexagonal star, it was the equal to determine the position of Taqila. Having heard the ins and outs of the matter, Lightning naturally understood what it meant for her to find Taqila.

That she was helping the Prince find the real cause of the outbreak of the war with the Devils, which the Church was trying to hide with all their might.

If she compared this with her father's exciting explorations trying to find new sea routes, it was even more exciting!

For her search, Lightning used the chart method. She had separated the map into many small squares, and with keeping a constant speed and counting the time that she flew, she would know how far she had flown. At the same time, she consistently drew out the inside of one of the squares. Every time one of the squares was filled, she also knew that the area had already been searched through.

Now she had already filled half of these squares.

The stormy clouds behind her seemed to be approaching faster than Lightning had previously imagined, the young girl could even faintly hear the thunder rolling in the clouds. To be safe she lowered her height, dropping down towards the forest.

At this moment, a gray shadow flashed past her vision.

Shocking Lightning, who immediately stopped her forward flight. Instead she hovered in the air, looking back through the mass of green.

But she could find nothing.

Was it an illusion? Lightning thought, not believing it, she decided to search the area again.

But this time, she flew at a much lower height. The forest was no longer one solid block of green, instead turning into a collection of mottled tree trunks, bifurcated branches, and all kinds of different leaves... in front of Lightning's eyes, the details of the world had emerged from a solid block of green.

After several scores of breaths, Lightning suddenly detected a small white stone tower hidden behind the tree branches. The complete upper part of the tower had been cut off, leading to the problem that the trees had grown higher than the tower and had covered it with a layer of green, making it nearly impossible to be

seen from up in the sky. If not for her wish to avoid the rain-laden clouds, she would most likely have missed it.

Lightning heart began to beat faster, could it be that this was the location marked on the map?

She slowly flew several rounds around the tower but didn't discover any unusual circumstances, so she decided to take a closer look to see what she could detect.

After landing, the witch only found out that it wasn't right to call it a white stone tower.

Its surface was covered with vines and moss, during the passing of time the tower had now become a gray-green. The tower was slightly tilted to the side, giving the impression that it had been hit by a huge force, which had filled the surrounding with scattered stones. These stones were made from the same material and color as the stone tower and must have been fragments from the tower's former top. The larger pieces were still clear to see, but the smaller ones had already been buried under soil and weeds. The former stone tower was certainly huge. Even now, the bottom area was still as large as Border Town's castle. Ruins like this would usually have a basement.

Logically speaking, the right thing to do was to record the location of the remains and then immediately return to the Border Town.

The various adventures she had heard also all reminded her, that

stepping into an already for hundreds of years sleeping ruin wasn't the right choice, for example the stale air in the sealed basement could have become toxic and would quickly end her short life.

Knowing all this, Lightning still didn't move one bit, her own curiosity was constantly nagging her: go in and take a look, it won't take long.

Once more, she looked up at the sky, seeing that the formerly relatively blue sky had turned a gloomy dark, apparently, a storm was coming.

With this it's decided, she told herself, flying through the rain would be very uncomfortable, so I can't help it and have to hide in the tower and if I'm already there, I can also take a quick look. In case I actually discover the basement, I absolutely won't go in by myself.

After thinking about it, Lightning's obedience had been suppressed by her curiosity, so she went to the vines and began to search for the entrance. When she found it, she pulled out a knife from her waist and cleaned out a small hole, it was only big enough that she could crawl through it. The door which was previously made out of wood had already been eroded away long ago, thus she could now successfully enter the tower.

As the top was torn off, she wasn't in need of a torch to see clearly. After circling the bottom of the tower, Lightning had still not discovered anything that was exciting. Apparently, over time all traces of items had been erased by nature. In addition to the remnants of the old walls, there was nothing else left on the

ground. Behind a still standing wall, she discovered a hole in the ground, which should be the place of the former stairs, but every trace of them had already been erased.

The access to the basement seemed very conspicuous, it was built in the southwest direction of the floor, facing the entrance of the stone tower. Lightning suspected, that if she moved along this path into the Wild Lands, she would discover the ancient Tower City Taqila.

At this time, the rain begun to fall from the sky, hitting Lightning on the nose. To keep herself dry and no better option, she entered the hole and slowly walked into the channel that extended underground, when she turned around a corner, she was stopped by a wooden door. Although the door wasn't completely corroded, it still looked dilapidated, as long as it was only touched a little, the door would surely be torn apart.

Soon, the outside rain turned into a downpour, and the crackling sound of the rain hitting the ground gradually became one, turning the chaos into an inseparable sound. Where she stood now, she was safe from the rain, but the water began to flow down into the hole. To avoid getting her shoes wet, Lightning lifted her feet from the ground and began to slowly float upwards.

Suddenly, she could vaguely hear a cry, mixed with the rain, it was almost indistinguishable.

The sudden sound let all her hairs stand up, and the young girl began to look panicky around. But within the narrow passage, she couldn't detect anything besides the scattered stones. With the

help of the faint light coming from outside, she opened her bag and took out a torch and flint from inside. Wanting to use some fire to take a better look.

At this point, the cries sounded again, but this time it actually seemed like it had come from behind the door. Lightning couldn't help it, she flinched and quickly turned around. Losing her hold on her torch, dropping it to the ground, where, with a loud splash, it entered the water.

This time the sound had been much clearer, she could faintly distinguish that it was a woman's voice.

Was someone in the basement? Thinking of this idea, she began to sweat, how can this be! The Stone Tower has already been left here for over four hundred years. Furthermore, it is also deeply hidden in the forest. In addition to myself, who else can have arrived here?

“Help me...”

When the sound could be heard for the third time, she was sure that the sound actually came from behind the wooden door. Also, it sounded like someone was in distress. Lightning swallowed her saliva and carefully placed her hand on the door, gently pushing against it. The wet and creamy wooden door immediately fell backward, smashing with a muffled bang onto the ground.

Exposing a tall figure directly in front of her!

Lightning felt her blood freeze in her veins, the silhouette looked exactly like the Devil's in Soraya's painting! In the dim light, the Devil seems to be watching her, it's massive body slightly bent forward, holding a huge ax within its hand which only had three fingers. In the reflecting light, she could clearly see the blood stains on the ax body. For a moment, the bloody images of these horrible monsters killing her sisters came to her mind.

"Ahhh!" Her scream echoed through the basement, she threw the flint she was still in her hand into the direction of the Devil before she turned around and flew with her fastest speed out of the channel, directly into the rain, fleeing into the direction of Border Town.

Lightning did not notice that when the piece of flint smashed in the devil's chest, it created the sound of a crisp crash. The area where it had hit, began to crack, quickly spreading until they covered the whole body. The Devil's body covered by cracks broke into many fragments, turning into white dust, which then disappeared in the wind.

Chapter 151 - Negotiations (Part 1)

After taking a look at the steam engine, Roland and Margaret returned to the office in the castle to continue their discussion and clear up all the details concerning the business contract. In case that such negotiation included haggling over the price, it was usual that the fight between both sides would need around one or two days to reach a conclusion.

Furthermore, it was generally the Finance Minister who was responsible for negotiating the contract, the Lord would only get to see the final numbers when he placed his signature. Only that the opposite side had already accepted the price, with this agreement, Roland also ended up saving a lot of effort.

“I expect the first batch of saltpeter will come in a month. It will be the amount of three sailboats full, and I will also follow them to Border Town.”

After giving the amount, Margaret quickly wrote some numbers on a parchment, “Calculated in gold royals at the actual market price, the value of the saltpeter will be around three hundred and fifteen gold royals.”

“Until then Border Town will be able to produce two steam engines,” Roland deliberately lowered the quantity, “they will have a total worth of a thousand gold royals. You can decide for yourself whether you want to make up the difference with gold royals, or you can also pay us using other resources.”

“What kind of goods do you need?”

“Iron, Copper, Lead, Green Vitriol,” Roland said, “those are all common minerals, but the first three goods I don’t need them as raw ore, but as already processed ingots. In addition, I need 10 sets of crystal clear glassware. Since they don’t need to have any carving on them, it won’t matter if they are in the form of a canteen or a wine cup. But they must be the best quality products of King’s City Alchemy Workshop. If the price exceeds the difference, I can fill it with gold royals or it can be deducted from the price of the two steam engines delivered the months afterward.”

“It seems you want to treat me as your dedicated trader,” Margaret said, “though I do not have a mine, I know a few peers who specialize in the ore trade, but I would have never expected with so few nobles living here, you would still consume such an enormous amount of saltpeter. Furthermore, Border Town was established next to the North Slope Mine, yet you still have to buy so many ores. This simply isn’t in line with my business sense. Your Highness, your territory is simply too inconceivable.”

A major trait to industrialize production is its great hunger for raw materials, in exchange for the fast output of finished products. So, Roland continued, “Later on, Border Town will be in even greater need for more goods, so I think it is for the best if we can reach a long-term trade agreement from now on.”

At this moment, Margaret suddenly became startled and was looking with a face full of surprise behind Roland. When he saw her unusual behavior, he subconsciously turned his head and

discovered Lightning, who soaked through to the skin by rainwater was pressing herself against the window, while still floating in the air. Her face was pale from fear and she frantically pushed against the glass, trying to come in. Her hair stuck as strands to her forehead, and the water from the rain was continuously flowing over her face. In general, she looked as if she had just stepped out of the river.

Roland quickly stood up to open the window. As soon it was possible, Lightning flew into the room, directly into Roland's arms and her face that was filled with panic soon relaxed, confusing the warm body she felt with memories from her past.

"Nightingale, quickly go and call Nana," Roland ordered anxiously.

"Yes." Came immediately the response out of the empty room besides him.

What happened to her? In the air, she shouldn't have encountered any demonic beasts, or any of the Devils. Or could it be, do they also have the ability to fly? Roland roughly checked Lightnings condition, and after he didn't find any obvious signs of trauma, he finally felt a little relief.

"Your Royal Highness, she... is she the one you have called Lightning?" Margaret spoke with a muzzled voice, slowly coming closer to the Prince, taking a carefully look at this little girl in his arms.

Hearing her question, Roland's heart began to beat faster, damn, how could I have forgotten about her? He ended up loudly shouting, "Sean!"

The guard immediately walked into the office.

"Excuse me, Miss Margaret, there is no other way. You will now have to stay here for a while," the Prince turned to her while still holding Lightning.

"She is a merchant from King's City, so bring her to an empty room on the first floor and take good care of her. Without my command, no one is to let her out of the room."

"As you command!"

"What? No, Your Highness... Please wait," Margaret suddenly realized what was happening, "I have no ill will towards witches, not to mention that she even is the daughter of Sir Thunder, I would never tell the Church about this."

"It is just a safety measure," Roland interrupted. "Later on, I'll come to see you to verify if you're telling the truth."

...

"Your Highness, she's woken up," Nightingale said, after opening the door to his office.

Roland nodded and followed Nightingale into Lightning's bedroom. There was still steam rising from the bucket beside the big bed, and her drenched clothes hung over the edge of the bucket. The bedside was surrounded by a group of witches, while Wendy was sitting on the bed gently combing the little girl's hair which until now was still not completely dry. But her previously pale face now had got some of its red color back. Her head laid against two pillows, while her quilt was pulled so high that only everything above her mouth wasn't covered and her eyes were staring at Roland since the moment he had entered the room.

“What is the situation?”

“She hadn't received any injury, her coma was caused by exhausting too much of her magic,” Nightingale replied. “Wendy helped her to clean her body, and when she got into the bed, she didn't wake up for a long time after.”

Roland went to bed and looked at the girl with a gentle smile, “What happened to you, that you would fly back through the torrential rains in so much panic?”

“I found the ruins,” Lightning lowly muttered, “but the Devil was already there.”

Hearing this, all the expression of the surrounding people immediately change.

“Did you enter it?” Scroll asked.

“No,” Lightning shook her head and continued to tell the story, “The Devil stood in the doorway of the basement, and I could hear people crying for help, but I was too scared, I could do nothing besides escape, I didn’t even try to save her.” Her voice shrunk to a whisper, “Am I not qualified to do the work of an Explorer?”

“No, you handled it well enough,” Roland encouraged her. “Good Explorers know how to read the situation and do not take unnecessary risks. When you couldn’t save her, escaping was definitely the right choice.”

“She had to be a witch,” Wendy thought aloud, “nobody else could reach the depths of the Concealing Forest except for another witch.”

“No, even a witch wouldn’t be able to go there,” Scroll shook her head in disagreement, “That is a ruin from four hundred and fifty years ago. Without a map, which indicates the direction one has to travel, the task of finding the location of the Stone Tower in such a vast sea of trees would be extremely difficult, unless...”

“Unless what?” Roland asked.

“Unless someone had already been living there,” Scroll said slowly.

“You mean that they didn’t come from the kingdom and found the tower, but instead they are already living there from four hundred and fifty years ago. One generation, after another, living a

life in seclusion?"

Within his heart, the Prince had already rejected this speculation. Living for the whole time in the Concealing Forest, shouldn't be possible! Besides a variety of terrible insects and poisonous plants, there was no stable source of food... only in case you were Bear Grylls, it would be possible to live for such a long-term in the forest. Not to mention, in that part of the world, they would have several months of snow every year. Also, with the constant threat of the demonic beasts and Devils about, living in the Concealing Forest was simply suicidal.

He once again turned in the Lightning's direction. "Were there any signs of smoke in the vicinity of the ruins?"

"No," the little girl shook her head.

"Maybe there exist more than one map," Soraya offered, "maybe there are other people like us, who are also looking for the whereabouts of the tower."

"No matter what it is, we cannot help them," Leaves concluded in disappointment. "Nobody can so quickly reach the Stone Tower, except for Lightning."

"I'm afraid we still need to know the real situation," Roland touch his chin, "In short, we have to find a way to ensure that we can come back safe and sound. For today, the teaching will be stopped, we are all in need of a good rest. When the time is right, the riddle will naturally solve itself."

Leaving Lightning's bedroom, he turned to Nightingale and said, "There is still another problem that we have to solve, next."

"Just let her take off the God's Stone of Retaliation," Nightingale laughed, "Then everything will be made clear to me."

Chapter 152 - Negotiations (Part 2)

At this time the rain outside the window had basically already stopped, the clouds were dispersing, and the sun was already on its way down, tinting the sky red.

Roland opened the door to the guest room on the first floor, seeing Margaret walking in circles in front of the fireplace, seeming quite restless. When Sean, who had been standing at the side of the room, saw that the Prince had just entered the room, he raised his hand to his chest and bowed. Margaret who had also seen the Prince enter, stopped her walking and stepped in front of him, anxiously asking, “Your Highness, how is Lightning?”

Roland became startled, there were several kinds of outcomes he had imagined, from being calm to angry and possibly acting cold, but he had never expected that her first sentence would be this.

“She’s all right... just a little tired.”

“Is that so? That’s good.” Margaret looked relieved.

“You seem to care about her a lot.”

“She looks exactly like her father, especially her narrow eyes and pointed nose... I could immediately see that she was the daughter of Thunder.”

Then with a sigh, she unbuttoned her neckline, lowered her

head, and took off a string of gold ornament hanging around her neck. “Only to verify it, previously you said... that you have the ability to judge if I am lying, did you speak about the ability of a witch? If this was what you previously meant and if you wanted to have me prove my sincerity, then could you please let her join in this conversation? I do not like the feeling of being secretly spied on.”

Set into the gold ornament, connected to the gold chain was a hexahedral light blue piece of jewelry, which had to be a high-quality God’s Stone of Retaliation.

Roland had been thinking about what he should say to reduce the other’s resentment and doubts, not thinking that it was actually Margaret who took up the initiative to do so. To be honest, he felt some admiration for the Seafolk woman. Despite being in such an incredibly unfavorable situation, she was still trying to grasp and hold the leading position in their dialogue. Whether it was her negotiation skills or acting style, everything was consistent with the identity of a successful merchant.

He received the offered God’s Stone of Retaliation and put it on a hanger beside the fireplace. Calculating it by the quality of the stone, the estimated suppressive range at which no magic could be used was around one meter. Looking at it from Nightingale’s eyes it would look like a black hole around one-meter big. To avoid the effective range of the God’s Stone of Retaliation, she had to always keep it away from her.

“Let’s go to the reception-room,” Roland offered. Since the other side showed their sincerity, he shouldn’t act so stingy himself.

When the two of them entered the reception-room, Nightingale had already stepped out from her fog and was sitting on the side on a couch, with her chin placed on both her hands and deliberately showing a bored expression as if she had already been waiting there for a long time.

When they had seated themselves, Roland first introduced Nightingale: “The name of the woman at my side is Nightingale, she is able to judge the authenticity of your words.”

“Hello, Miss Nightingale,” said Margaret, nodding her head, and receiving a greeting in return.

“You previously said, you don’t harbor negative feelings for witches, why?” Roland immediately started with his first question, which he most wanted to know, “As far as I am aware, the Fjords also belongs under the influence of the Church.”

“But their influence is far weaker than the belief of the Three Gods. Regarding this, the Seafolk and the Sandpeople are quite similar. They both worship the sky, the sea, and the earth. As for me...” she paused, “I had a very important and good friend. In the middle of a fishing trip with my friend, it happened that we were unexpectedly hit by a storm. Fighting for our lives, our sailboat was unfortunately hit by a wave, breaking it into many pieces. During this disaster, she became a witch, getting the ability to breath like a fish. She found me when I had already lost consciousness and was floating on the water, so it was she who dragged me to the shore.

“What happened later?” Nightingale curiosity was picked.

“Soon after I had woken up, she left... perhaps bigger than the wish to be with me, she was more eager to be back in the sea,” said Margaret regretfully, “Since then I have never seen her again. People often say that she would appear during foggy days, raising her body out of the water and guiding the fishing boats with her singing. Guiding them successfully around the rocks. No matter what, my friend could never be evil, nor the Devil ‘s minion.”

Roland nodded, witches who had awakened to their power were previously only ordinary people, and in cases where the people already knew the witches before their awakening and had deep contact with and understanding of them, their impression would be hard to change only by the unilateral rhetoric of the church.

“You seem to know a lot about the power of witches. Only with one sentence, you were able to guess that I had more than one witch.”

“Honestly, because of the relationship with my childhood friend and partner, I became interested in witches. I had even thought myself about the possibility to host those strange women.”

Margaret smiled, “Unfortunately, King’s City is completely differently than Border Town, in the end, I had to give up on that idea because the risk was too big. Seeing that Lightning had directly moved into your arms, it seems that she is very close to you, plus she’s a witch... So, I thought that you could be the same as me, someone, who doesn’t hate the witches. As a Lord, hiding a few witches shouldn’t be a difficult task for you, especially here in the borderland. But you still have to be very careful, if you are

found by the Church, it would be hard for you to save them.”

Speaking of it, until now Nightingale still did not find any sign that the other had lied. With this, she had already rejected the possibility of Margaret informing the Church. Roland also finally came to a conclusion in his heart, so with a slightly apologetic tone he said: “It seems that I was indeed a bit oversensitive, I hope you don’t mind.”

“No, Your Highness, after all, it was also for Lightning and the safety of the other women...” Margaret waved dismissively with her hand, “Au contraire, if you didn’t care, then you would truly be an irresponsible person.”

“Are you familiar with Thunder?” Roland asked. “Your love for Lightning is much greater than the concern of ordinary people for the heroic children.”

In the face of such a question, Margery hesitated for a moment. Roland had said, if she didn’t want to answer a question, she should just act as he had never asked, but she eventually slowly started to speak: “To tell you the truth, later when I left the fishing village, I joined one of the expeditions of Sir Thunder, together with them I explored the sea for a long time. As a young and new team member, Sir Thunder and his wife took extra care of me. On the day that Lighting was born, I was also there.

“She was born on board?”

“Yes, during a storm. Outside of the cabin, the thunder rolled

and lightning continually lit up the sky. However, shortly after her birth, Sir Thunder's wife died because of a sepsis infection, and I... acted as her half-mother. But I couldn't give her any breast milk, I used to chew wheat porridge and mixed it together with fish eggs and flour, slowly feeding it to her. "Margaret's voice has become very gentle. "Although Sir Thunder was incomparably sad, he still had to command the flotilla, without him as the backbone, the crew would quickly collapse after only a few months. During that time, I just stayed in the cabin, watching over how Lightning slowly grew. Until Sir Thunder found the Shadow Islands. After the discovery, we returned to the Crescent Moon Bay, and the expedition was over. Not much later I left the Fjord and settled down in the Kingdom of Graycastle."

"So that was what it was," Roland lamented in his heart, no wonder that when she heard the name of Thunder, her reaction would be so strong. As for why Margaret had decided not to continue to follow Thunder on his adventures, he could roughly guess one or two reasons. Even so, it seemed to be the beginning of a love story, it didn't mean that the ending would be one, one had hoped for.

Such a coincidence, to meet again after crossing many rivers and walking along windy mountain roads... Now that they had already such a close relationship, wasn't it possible to get an even bigger discount for buying and selling? He coughed twice, "Ms. Margaret since we can be counted as acquaintances, about that deal."

"Your Highness, that just won't do," Margaret laughed. "A deal is a deal. This is the businessman's eternal principle."

Chapter 153 - Alchemy (Part 1)

Kyle Sichi walked into the Alchemy Workshop.

“Head Instructor,” when the apprentices saw him enter they immediately bowed.

He waved his hand, “You may carry on.”

The apprentice squatted down again, once again busying themselves with their work.

The outermost part of the workshop was the cleaning and sorting room; it was here that all of the gathered materials from all over the Kingdom of Graycastle was cleaned, sorted, filtered and ground down. The design of the cleaning and sorting room was very ingenious, laid within the stone floor were two rills with water flowing in them which were also parallel to each other. The area in the middle was the path, while the outermost sides of the room were used as cleansing area, and were accessible by wooden bridges.

At first glance, the long and narrow washroom was divided by the two streams into three sections. The light would fall into the room through windows on both sides, shining on the stone floor and streams, sending strips of lights through the long room. The overlap between light and dark resembled the strip of a snake.

Nearly one hundred apprentices leaned against the walls, dealing with the materials assigned to them. If the impurities could be

easily cleaned and were lighter than the water, it could be directly thrown into the stream. If it was heavier than water, they would be put into a basket, to be brought out of the washing room and then discarded. The effect of cleaning with running water was several times more effective than cleaning in a cask of stagnant water.

The apprentice had to study here for three to five years. Only when their proficiency in the sorting and cleaning of all kinds of materials were good enough and the corresponding knowledge was known by them, did they get the opportunity to be selected as a disciple under an instructor, and in so doing moving on to the next room.

Kyle marched through the washing room, stepping into the core area of the Alchemy Workshop, the refining room.

When he opened the door, his line of sight suddenly opened to a wide panorama, twelve giant wooden pillars, all of which came out of the Concealing Forest and were delivered by ship, propping up this extremely spacious room. Within the surrounding stone walls, there were many windows, and even the roof was included in the construction and had many windows connected to the patio, making the room very bright.

In the center of the refining room, there were arranged six wide wooden tables. The tables were filled with all kinds of alchemical utensils: round bottomed flasks, glasses, scales, mortars, furnaces, crucibles... Each instructor was responsible for the management and use of one table, and Kyle, as Redwater City's Head Instructor, naturally had the longest and widest table to himself, with most of

the utensils placed on it.

The room was always full of clutter and in disorder, just like the alchemy process in general. Mixing all kinds of raw materials together then heating, carbonizing, watering or burning them. The results were ever changing, and simply fascinating.

In case you were able to find a clear path to follow within all these changes and disorders, it would become written down, turning it into one of the extremely rare alchemy formulas. As long as you were able to create a unique formula, you could be called an alchemist. So far, Kyle has had written down more than a dozen alchemy formulas, and he believed that each of them had been directly sent to him by God and that alchemy could be developing to such a level, that it would even be possible to separate the origin, making it possible to transmute everything.

“Chavez, how far are you with your Snow Powder imitation?” He asked.

Hearing his name, a twenty-year-old young man came over, shaking his head. “These wretched alchemists of King’s City definitely still add other raw materials into it. Until now the powder is too fine that it can’t even be extracted and used for anything useful.”

He was Redwater’s Alchemy Workshop’s youngest alchemist, and now he wanted to recreate the alchemy recipe for Snow Powder, but it seemed to be impossible without a long accumulation of knowledge, many attempts and sometimes a bit of luck. Many people, for their whole lifetime, only managed to become

disciplines, even until their death they were unable to get past the last step. Chavez, however, had a remarkable talent for alchemy, two years ago, he summarized the recipe of dry distillation of green vitriol to receive an acidic liquid. Winning the recognition of five alchemists, owning from now on his own long table.

“Do not worry; it will come slowly.” Kyle smiled and patted the young man’s shoulder, offering him some comfort. After eight years, as chief instructor, Kyle naturally understood the difficulty of finding the right path through all the disorder and chaos. “However, I ended up making something good yesterday evening, the moment those haughty animals examine it they will lose all their color. Come with me.”

He went to his desk, to where he had had two disciplines deliver a storage box of about half a person’s height and made completely out of iron. Making it nearly impossible to be stolen nor easy to be destroyed. He pulled out the key and opened the first layer of lattice, within the middle of the lattice there laid a small piece of transparent crystal.

“Did you cut off a piece of a crystal?” Chavez who stood at the side took the crystal carefully into his hand to examine it, holding it in front of the window, “No, this is... Crystal Glass! God, you did it!”

“Yes,” Kyle smiled proudly, “I already can’t wait to see their expression when those guys discover that their proudest alchemy discovery had been successfully imitated by me, they will end up showing such a wonderful expression.”

Chavez who hadn't been able to suppress his exclamation had gathered the attention of all the others alchemists. They all put down their work and came over to take a look for themselves.

"This is the product you've worked on until late last night? It really is great."

"It's so beautiful, it looks just like a crystal."

"Congratulations, this will let the place of our Alchemy Workshop within the Duke's heart greatly increase."

"How did you do it, can you tell me?"

Kyle nodded, "We all know, that the glass made out of the river sand comes extremely close to it, but in the end when burned, the glass will still contain different colors. This is because the sand still contains some impurities. Now there are two possibilities, first to think of ways to remove the impurities, second to try to get sand which is purer from the beginning. We all tried both methods, I also did the same. The success of the alchemical process largely depends on chances and luck. I selected fine white sand from Willow Town and sandstone from the Fallen Dragon Ridge... "

Everyone around him was quietly listening, no one spoke a word until he had finished his explanation, they even tried to suppress their breath, "So that's how it's done, that was very thoughtful of you."

Crystals were very rare and expensive gems, and the colorless and transparent crystal are even rarer. So only the clearest of translucent glass had the right to be known as Crystal Glass. The haughtiness of the Alchemy Workshop in the King's City was mostly based on their method for producing Crystal Glass. Always dominating the Redwater City's Alchemy Workshop. Furthermore, the yearly income of gold royals let the Duke of Redwater City develop a deep feeling of envy.

But after today, this situation would soon change. If Chavez could also figure out the composition of Snow Powder, coupled with the double-stone method to create acid, we will be able to completely overthrow the domineering position of King's City's Alchemy Workshop. By then, those who are always used to looking down on other people, I am afraid they will have no choice other than to lower their cooky heads. After picturing this, Kyle Kimmel mood became even better.

As he was preparing himself to screen the raw materials for the second batch of Crystal Glass, a frantic discipline run to his side, "Chief Instructor, a messenger from Border Town from the Western Border want to see you, he brought a letter from Roland Wimbledon with him the 4th Prince.

"4th Prince?" Kyle began to frown, it seemed that there really was such a person in the Royal Family. He knew nearly nothing about nobility, in his impression they were all uneducated and ignorant, always fighting for more power and wealth. "What is he looking for?"

"I do not know, the messenger said that as soon as you read the

letter, you will naturally understand the meaning of His Royal Highness.”

“...” The Chief Instructor exposed an extremely impatient look, in all likelihood, the content of the letter will be recruitment offer for only a small sum, if that’s the case, I should show him that alchemy isn’t a cheap trick. However, since the other person is a prince, I still have to maintain a basic state of etiquette, “Take me to see him, so that I can get the letter and send him on his way!”

Chapter 154 - Alchemy (Part 2)

When Kyle Sichi returned home, it was already completely dark outside.

After dinner with his family, he returned to his study and recorded the recipe for Crystal Glass together with its required raw materials and his experience of producing it in his own book, “The Door to Alchemy”.

In it, he had recorded his journey from the day he had started as an apprentice to his days as Chief Instructor. At the same time, he had also included all of the newly discovered alchemic recipes of the Redwater Alchemy Workshop.

Kyle believed that with the help of this book, he would earn his place in all kinds of history books. Even thousands of years later, alchemists would still have his name deeply engraved in their minds.

Only after the candle was nearly burnt out did Kyle finally put down his pen and made himself ready to sleep.

Suddenly, he remembered that he still had the letter from the Prince, and until now, he hadn’t read a word of it. Glancing at the candle, he saw that only a fingernail’s worth of candle was left, so he decided to use the last bit of time to read this letter so that he could give a verbal reply to the messenger on the next day. The small remaining bit of candle would only be enough for him to write a few dozens of words, but it would still be enough to read a

worthless letter.

After opening the envelope, he saw that it contained three sheets of paper, of which the first page was the common courtesy and introduction of their titles and their territory. Kyle didn't even bother himself to take a look at it; he directly moved on to the second page.

The second page didn't contain the expected recruiting offer or lash-out, making Kyle feel a little surprised. Instead, all that was written were five strange formulas. After taking a careful look, he noticed that each formula was made up out of three compositions.

Oh, that's a little mean, he smiled, in the end, regardless of the which purpose the Prince had, at least he was somewhat tricky in the end.

He swept his gaze over the first line.

“Dry distillation of Saltpeter produces nitric acid.”

Saltpeter... dry distillation... nitric acid, these were all terms used in alchemy. Kyle was totally surprised, isn't this the double stone acid method?

“The acidic liquid produced by dry distillation of Saltpeter has to be gathered inside a special container. It looks exactly like ordinary water, so it will be hard to recognize. However, it is very corrosive. Not only does it have the ability to burn away skin, but it can even

dissolve some metals.“

This... is actually an alchemic formula? Is it possible that Border Town also has an Alchemy Instructor?

He quickly moved his gaze to the next line

If the first sentence was already enough to surprise him, then the second sentence was simply incredible.

It consisted of a bunch of inexplicable symbols, standing side by side, forming an equation. Kyle frowned. He had never seen such strange symbols in his whole life.

Looking further down, it seemed that the third sentence was the interpretation of the second sentence, including the names and meanings of the symbols. To be honest, he was still unable to understand the symbols even with the explanation. The hard to pronounce words were apparently all newly coined words. In order to link the words with the symbols, he had to read them again and again. But even after all this, the sentence meaning was still a much too complex puzzle for him.

At this moment, the flame of the candle shook twice and went out.

Hell! Kyle cursed loudly within his heart, and without any hesitation he took a new candle from the drawer, and began reading once more.

...

When the second candle had already burned halfway, the Chief Instructor's hands that were holding the pages were shaking heavily.

What seemed to be a letter with nearly nothing on it had taken many times longer than the usual time spent reading a neatly written page.

On top of the second page of the letter there were only five formulas. Unexpectedly, they were all alchemy formulas!

If it was only given like this, then they would still be an outstanding master alchemist, but it was still not an impossible accomplishment to sum up five alchemy recipes by oneself. However, these five formulas, in addition to the first method for producing acid, were all correlated well with each other. Certain neologisms appeared repeatedly, giving the appearance that it was a maintained cycle.

“Nitric acid reacts with silver to produce silver nitrate, mixed together with water it becomes nitric oxide.”

“Silver nitrate reacts with iron to form ferrous nitrate and silver.”

“Silver nitrate reacts with copper to form copper nitrate and

silver.”

“Copper nitrate reacts with iron to form ferrous nitrate and copper.”

Previously, Kyle had already put a silver bar into the acidic liquid. It hadn’t taken long before the silver was dissolved. Dissolving something or letting it become invisible were the characteristic of acid, it corroded anything. But now, this unknown alchemist had stated that the silver nitrate had been dissolved in the water and on the surface it seemed to have gone away, but in fact, the silver had only morphed into another kind of existence, instead of being annihilated as previously thought.

How can this be?

No... Kyle shook his head. Apparently, the other side had already guessed my way of thinking, so that meant, these formulas correlating with each other isn’t something accidental, he realized. This person wrote these formulas exactly so that I could confirm them, whether it is silver, iron or copper, these are all common minerals. According to the following alchemy recipes, the silver can reappear again, proving that it wasn’t annihilated, and still exists within the acid.

Seeing these formulas so neatly arranged on the paper again and again, it became increasingly more difficult for him to breath. If these alchemy formulas could be proven to be true, their years of accumulated experience, the effort that all of his colleagues had put in and even the writing in his own book “The Door to Alchemy” would be nothing more than a joke!

“You can go to sleep early on with the child; I have to go to the Alchemy Workshop again!”

To the surprise of his wife, he wouldn’t attend to her tonight. Instead, Kyle put on his coat and left straight into the night.

Arriving at the Alchemy Square, he immediately called for the three disciples who were still buzzy on their duties, telling them that he now had to conduct an alchemy test and they had to light all the torches and candles, the more they lit, the better. His order was swiftly quickly executed, and soon after his wide table became illuminated by flames. Afterward, his disciples began to shuffling between the materials room and the refining room, preparing all the test materials for the Chief Instructor.

They had already produced several acid liquids out of dry distilled saltpeter, so he could immediately start verifying the second alchemy recipe.

He took some of the acid liquid and poured it into a glass; he then put a silver bar into it. Soon after the reaction started and the bar gradually corroded, creating many small bubbles.

To shorten the anxiety filled waiting process, he turned his attention to the third page of the letter.

But on it were only one short sentence: “This was only a small part of my work, if you want to know more answers, you have to come to Border Town.”

Damn it! Writing this sentence is equivalent to writing nothing! If I'm not able to verify the formulas, I have no other option other than to go and visit this unknown master. Otherwise, there will only be sleepless nights left to me for the rest of my life.

After waiting until no more bubbles emerged, he removed the incomplete dissolved silver bar and put a small piece of copper into the cup instead.

Immediately an incredible things started to happen on the surface of the copper, a thin white film began to appear, looking like a beetle's shell. The white layer became larger and larger, slowly covering the whole surface of the copper, while the colorless acid slowly turned blue.

It is exactly the same as described in the letter!

“The white precipitate is silver, and the newly created copper nitrate, just like silver nitrate, is soluble in water. However, the copper nitrate will turn the water blue.”

Looking into the cup, Kyle Sichi saw that it had turned blue, just as stated.

...

Early the next day, when Chavez came to the Alchemic Workshop, he was greeted by the Chief Instructor who looked

completely haggard with deep black circles under his eyes, shocking him greatly.

“Didn’t you get any sleep last night?” Chavez asked surprised, “Had you worked the night through to create a second batch of Crystal Glass?”

Kyle just shook his head and signaled that he should follow him to his table. There he tiredly asked: “You are the disciple of which I’m the proudest, so I would like to ask, what do you think alchemy is?”

“Uh... just what you have taught me,” looking at the table Chavez noticed that it was fully loaded with a number of glasses, including a few cups which were filled with solutions of different colors. For example one of them was sky blue and very eye-catching. Could this be the reason that the Chief Instructor did not sleep last night? Although Chavez was full of confusion, he still replied honestly, “I think the same, the essence of alchemy is to find the truth of the world in all the disorder and chaos...”

“No, no, Chavez, I was wrong,” Kyle interrupted. “Everyone was wrong. That isn’t Alchemy.”

Was it...? Chalvez felt that the other side acted strangely. First, he worked the whole night through in the Alchemy Workshop, and now he asks such baffling questions. Not able to wait for Chavez next question, the Head Instructor began to explain: “Unlike what you, I and everyone else thought, Alchemy is ordered. It can even be said that it is following the principle of one plus one equals two. No matter what you do, material will never

increase nor will it disappear.”

“Will never increase or disappear? What are you talking about? Isn’t that what alchemist usually do? To create new things, we just put some commonly seen raw materials and combine them after filtering and separation,” Chavez answered in bewilderment.

“Yes, ah, I also thought like so, but now after I have read the letter sent by the Lord of Border Town...” Kyle patted his shoulder, opened his mouth and said some surprising words to Chavez, “I will soon leave this city, and go to Border Town to find some answers. You... Do you want to come with me?”

Chapter 155 - Visitor

Roland received the first purchase order for the steam engine, and the transaction's amount was the largest so far.

Each “naked engine” for the price of 500 gold royals, with the first delivery, planned for in two months, followed by an increase of one engine per month until it reached a total of ten engines together. For future technical support, like replacing broken parts or improving equipment, a payment of additional gold royals would then be required. Since the natives had never heard of a free warranty service, it meant more money for Roland.

Barov was the one who was most excited about the deal, in his view, every increase in the Town Hall’s revenue no matter whether it was by looting or by trade was worthy of praise. But there were naturally also some who were against it, for example, Carter, Scroll, and Nightingale expressed all their opinion, they felt that it was still too early for them to sell these powerful machines to outsiders, even more so, considering in hindsight, that Border Town didn’t even have enough machines for themselves.

Roland didn’t explain his reason to them because he didn’t look at it only from the view of a Lord. No, he also looked at it from the perspective of a way in which he could promote the speed of the industrial revolution.

It was almost impossible to achieve the task of advancing the process of industrialization alone, even with the knowledge of later generations. After all, the amount Border Town could handle was

extremely limited. Even if he produced a lot of industrial products now, there would still be no one there to buy them from him. So, there was only one solution available to him, he must allow more people to join in on the revolution, only by doing this could new power applications sweep across the kingdom like a wave.

What would he get by selling the steam engine?

A sufficient amount of money, a huge number of new jobs, as well as a group of skilled workers, with the latter being the most important part.

This was also the reason for Roland's low production rate.

With Anna's new ability, her former and new production efficiency shouldn't even be mentioned in the same breath. As long as she had enough raw materials, she could now cut out a dozen of steam engines a day.

Such products could also easily be sold, but that would only be simply the "selling" of a machine.

But if he wanted to develop the industry, he had to set up a special team responsible for production, assembly, and the maintenance of the steam engine. In Roland's plan, he would build a factory with all the needed tools, such as a boring machine, planning machine, milling machine, and so forth. The complete steam engine production would only be done by the hands of ordinary workers.

In the beginning, it should be expected that the factory's efficiency would still be low, and the quality of the first products would also be too horrible to look at, but slowly, everything would surely come on to the right track. In addition, with the experience Anna had gathered by creating them step by step on her own, as long as the workers became familiar with the process, it would be guaranteed that the output would start to increase.

The next step would be to use the profits from the sale of machinery to expand the production scale and also to train more workers. While at the same time, the already experienced older workers, would gain the ability to manufacture products of higher quality, such as steam trains, steam ships, and so forth.

For Roland, there was no doubt that this would become a virtuous cycle. Those to whom he had sold the steam engine would also indirectly create benefits for Border Town. For example, if they used them for mining, they could reduce the ore prices; if they used them for shipping, it would also promote trade; when used for spinning and weaving, they could make up for their own deficiency.

Roland was already eager to see how the new steam power would spread over the whole nation and all these machines would come from Border Town. And once he was able to unify the entire Kingdom of Graycastle, he could then save a lot of time and work.

He also considered the possibility that buyers could try to imitate the steam engine, but for the new steam engine, he would use new circular cylinder which could only be drilled out by using his boring machine. He had also considered deliberately designing

some complex components, which would be hard to reproduce by relying on the current level of technology. Roland didn't believe that they would be able to produce a qualitatively good steam engine, even if they could count on a witch that was able to provide high temperature.

After being able to negotiate such a big order, and after finding a way to sell his industrial products, Roland should have felt elated, but he couldn't find any trace of happiness within himself at all.

"Everything has cleared up itself, so why are you still showing such a bitter face?" Nightingale lifted her legs and sat by the side of the table, holding a plate of dried fish. "Are you still troubled with the news of the Church?"

When Scroll wasn't around, Nightingale's behavior always became a lot more casual. Sitting on the corner of his desk or laying down on the couch were all her usual places. For other lords, actions such as these would be seen as offensive, but Roland became aware of the fact that he didn't mind it as much as he thought he would, and Nightingale was also clearly also aware of it.

"I always wondered why the Church would support Garcia and me for the fight to the throne, but now I think I'm starting to understand it. If my guess is right, I'm afraid that Timothy also got an invitation from the Church." Roland knit his brow.

In addition to the business deal, Margaret also brought him a lot of new intelligence that she had gathered from the Four Kingdoms. One of the things that Roland was the most surprised about was

that the Church had attacked and taken over the Kingdom of Endless Winter. If the merchant was right, they would now also be busy preparing the last steps before they launched an attack on the Wolfsheart Kingdom. This news had hit Roland like a thunderbolt out of the blue, and ever since then, he had turned all of this information in his head over and over, slowly forming a picture filled with bad omens.

“Why should they support all three of you at the same time with the fight for the throne?”

“It’s not called supporting, it’s called consuming.” Roland shook his head, “The Church doesn’t care if the war spreads throughout the whole country, they’ll be happy as long as they see a lot of infighting inside the Kingdom of Graycastle. As for the possibility that the Church’s believers might get involved in the war, this didn’t actually matter to them. The Kingdom of Graycastle isn’t as weak as the Kingdom of Eternal Winter was. With its vast territory and also a large number of population, if they wanted to take it over by force, they would have lost a lot of their military power. But by helping us to kill each other, they only have to pay a small price to take over the kingdom. It doesn’t matter how many believers they would have left, after all, the Church wanted to build its own Kingdom. “Those pills... were nothing more than a well-prepared trap.”

When Wimbledon III issued the order for the battle of the throne, it was the same as giving the Church the right to dictate the situation. After the Kingdom of Graycastle, the Wolfsheart Kingdom and the Kingdom of Endless Winter have been taken over by them, the Kingdom of Dawn won’t be able to stay standing will be soon to fall. The real purpose of the Church is probably the

reunification of the Four Kingdoms, taking into account how slow information travels during this era, and the people's indifference to politics, it is quite possible that they will only then be able to see the truth and hear the warnings after its already too late.

This was why he was feeling so anxious.

At the moment, there was no basis for them to establish a united front, and hoping that the nobility of the Kingdom of Graycastle will rush to their rescue if they were to hear his fantastic tale, it was more likely that they would rush to the Church and act as their last line of defense. Thus, if Roland wanted to stop them, he had to rely almost entirely on the troops of the Western Territory.

"But you also have those new weapons and the Army of Judges isn't much stronger than ordinary knights, I don't believe that they could win against you."

Roland could still clearly remember the time when the Church was a horrible monster for Nightingale, a source of endless fear. But, that she now had so much confidence in herself, came as a small surprise.

He still managed to show her a reassuring smile, but inwardly he could only sigh. It wouldn't be difficult for Anna to make Revolvers, but there was still a big difference between producing a prototype and launching a mass production of something. Whether it was the reset of the trigger or the automatically turning of the cylinder, both showed good performance. But as long as he couldn't solve the problem of how to fire the bullets, there wouldn't be any real value in these new weapons. In the absence of

mercury, or mercuric nitrate, he will have to use some alternative materials as a primer.

Hopefully, the guard I sent to the City of Redwater will bring back good news, Roland thought.

Just at this moment, when he had recovered the enthusiasm of the former day, Lightning who should have been busy carrying out her daily training, came into the office and brought an unexpected message. The flag flowing at the Eastern Side of Border Town, near the woods was replaced by a blue flag.

According to Roland secret information system, the blue flag represented that there was a new witch that had entered Border Town.

Chapter 156 - Putting The Picture Together

Theo ascended a small hill, from here he could vaguely see the edge of Border Town and also the outline of the Lord's Castle.

Finally, I'm back, he thought, previously in order to reach Silver City he had needed half a month, but the way back they only needed seven days, the longest time of which was spent on the road between Silver City and Redwater City. Although it seemed that Ashes didn't care for it herself, Theo still chose scarcely used trails to reduce the possibility of being caught by the Church.

Ashes was the name he had gotten from his witch companion, but even after all this time Theo didn't know if that name was her real one or not. During their travel, she was always dressed in a black robe and a great sword was wrapped in clothes on her back.

Her long black hair was tied into a simple tail, dangling down to her waist. Whether it was during the ride or their travel on a boat, she rarely put her focus on Theo. She always walked alone at the front, taking in the surrounding scenery. Probably for her, this trip to Border Town was just a relaxed and comfortable stroll sort of like a sightseeing tour.

Sometimes Theo would doubt his own judgment, was she really a soldier? She could easily stumble over the robe she wore, to keep such long hair was equivalent to showing plenty of holes in her defenses. Furthermore, from the beginning of their journey Ashes never seemed to be afraid of presenting her back to him, the part of her body that he saw from her the most, was always her back.

He didn't believe that a witch would be able to trust other people so quickly, only letting him guess that she might be confident enough in her own abilities, that even a God's Stone of Retaliation wouldn't be a threat to her.

Theo circled the hillside, soon finding his goal, a flagpole with a red flag hanging on it. He went to the flagpole and dug a bundle out from the mud. Folded within it was a blue flag which was used as a replacement for the red flag. Afterward, he sat down on the ground and clasped his hands.

"That's all you have to do?" Asked Ashes.

"At least that was what they had said," Theo wiped away the sweat that had appeared on his forehead. "Go to the foot of the hill on the northeast side of the town. There, you have to follow the stone trail until you reach a flagpole. When you arrived at the pole, you only need to replace the flying flag with the blue one buried beside the pole. We will see the flag and soon arrive at your location, so from then on you will only need to wait and we will come."

Ashes nodded and then began to look for a relatively clean place to sit, she then reached out her hand in Theo's direction, "Eat."

"Uh...wait a moment!" Theo unlocked his backpack and took a piece of dried meat from inside it. He first tore it in half and threw one piece of it into his own mouth, while throwing the rest of the meat to Ashes.

Theo sighed when he saw the witch put the meat into her small mouth and began to chew. Who could have thought that in addition to her great sword, she did not even have one copper royal on her whole body. Even though she was totally penniless she still dared to swagger so much during their rush back to Border Town. During the whole way, all the accommodation and meals had been paid for by himself. The room's in the inns had to be single bedrooms of the finest quality, and when they ate it could only be meat, dry food and things like portable foods. Furthermore, Theo always had to eat the first half of it by himself before she would eat her part.

Probably with the exception of the time she was on the field, she was a very cautious person. However, wouldn't the most prudent approach to safety be to prepare her own food?

"You always wanted to know where we are going; it is to the opposite part of the channel." After swallowing the meat, Ashes suddenly said, "I am not sure if you've ever heard the rumors about the Fjords, but there are countless islands there. Some of them have a very dangerous environment, so those are always scarcely populated. We are going to settle on one of those islands and build homes on it that only belong to witches."

"..." Theo was stunned, no matter how he had tried to inquire from her before, she had always been silent, so why had she suddenly taken the initiative by herself to bring up this matter?

"Are you surprised, are you asking yourself why I didn't bring up this subject before?"

Ashes began to explain seriously. “There was the possibility that you were a liar, who would pretend to sleep but at night would instead run to the Church. But now the girls should have already reached halfway to their goal; they should already have entered the merchant ferry to the Fjord. So even if you tell them now, the Church will be unable to stop them. Also, I came here to take the other witches of the Witch Cooperation Association with me, so sooner or later the news will have already reached your ear, thus continuing to hide it has already become meaningless.”

“Even though I’ve already brought you to Border Town, you still cannot rule out the possibility that I’m a liar.”

“Yes, that’s true,” said Ashes, stressing every word, “But in the end, if we are unable to meet another witch, you will die here, together with everyone else who is trying to harm us witches.”

“All right,” Theo took a deep breath. “Can I ask you some other questions?”

Ashes thought for a moment, “Sure, but I can’t guarantee that I will answer.”

“Do you come from the Kingdom of Graycastle? I have never seen such eyes as yours before.” He decided to start to ask her about her origin first. This shouldn’t be any kind of sensitive information and at the same time it should reduce the wariness in her heart.

“I was born in the Kingdom of Endless Winter, but this has nothing to do with the color of my eyes. The moment I became a

witch, my eyes turned into this pair of eyes you see now.”

“Kingdom of Endless Winter? That’s a long way between your kingdom and the Kingdom of Graycastle. There are even two other kingdoms between them, so how did you come to Silver City?”

“When I was young I was sold the Church, and then...” She paused. “I’ve been wandering from the monastery in the Old Holy City all the way to the Kingdom of Graycastle. Until I meet her, finally ending my wandering life.”

“She?” Theo asked curiously.

“Tilly Wimbledon,” Ashes answered, suddenly showing a warm expression on her face. “She took me in.”

The guard’s heart beat faster, when he had previously heard her saying the name Tilly, he had never thought that it was any sort of famous person. But now with the Wimbledon family name attached to it, the meaning became entirely different. Tilly Wimbledon was Roland Wimbledon’s sister, the 5th Princess of the Kingdom of Graycastle. So, when he asked her his next question, his voice quivered. “She, is she your leader?”

“Leader?” Ashes nodded. “To me, she is so much more; she is the most important person to me... someone that no one else could ever replace.”

When the night fell, the two lit up a bonfire.

Ashes took off her sword, raising it a little bit out of its cover, showing that the edge of the weapon was close to the width of her waist and also that it was covered with many marks of previous clashes. The grayish sword didn't have any edge that was usually seen on a blade, and its weight alone was enough to squash any one person. For most people lifting this sword would already be an impossible task, but in her hands, it seemed to only be as heavy as a light blade.

How many blacksmiths had she robbed, in order to get enough material to forge a sword like that, ah, Theo thought, if the Prince and his witches delay for much longer, it is entirely possible that I will become the next victim of that sword.

"I heard that the Lord of Border Town is also a... Wimbledon," he decided to find something to talk about. Otherwise, the waiting time seemed to be especially hard for him to bear.

"Roland Wimbledon," she muttered, "I have seen him before."

"What?" Theo opened his mouth.

"I was sheltered by Tilly and began to work as her guard in the palace. So there naturally was the opportunity to meet several of her brothers and sisters." Ashes seem to already have a good understanding of the 4th Prince, "incompetent, arrogant, without any learning or skills. It was hard to believe that he was Tilly 's brother. Also... in some areas his courage wasn't so small."

To the end of her sentence, her tone had become colder.

Theo could not keep himself from shuddering. He had heard a lot of rumors of the Prince previous behavior. For example, he would always brag, was also fond of using cunning plots and things like molesting someone else's maid. Although he had never used violence or threatened the other side, it was still hard to avoid someone in his position. Surely, he wouldn't...

At this moment, Ashes suddenly stood up, staring into the direction of the road, "Someone has come, and they are more than one."

Theo followed her gaze and he could also slowly see the outline of figures gradually appearing from the night's darkness. The one who took the lead was the witch personally responsible for His Royal Highness' security, Nightingale.

Chapter 157 - Ashes (Part 1)

When Ashes saw the people appear, she immediately knew that they were witches. She could feel the magic on their bodies, showing that Theo had not lied. But that wasn't all, she could also roughly determine their strength, especially from the witch leading them. Her magic felt like a sharp knife – just by focusing on her, she could already feel a faint stabbing pain.

"My name is Ashes. I'm so glad to meet you sisters of the Witch Cooperation Association." Ashes put her sword aside and approached the four witches to embrace one after another... No, she thought, there are five of them. Ashes raised her head, looking at the black spot circling above them in the sky, "Doesn't she want to come down?"

"She acts as our lookout," the witch in the lead answered laughingly, "I am Nightingale," then she pointed at the other three witches, "They're Scroll, Leaves, and Echo." Then she pointed upwards, "and the little girl in the sky is Lightning."

When Ashes looked at Scroll, she was startled. The feeling of magic she got from her body was feeble, it seems like her body was constantly hidden behind clouds. Getting such feeling gave her a big surprise, "An extraordinary?"

Hearing her question, Nightingale became curious. "Are you able to see the magic?"

"No, not seeing but feeling," Ashes explained, "Since their body

got changed by magic, extraordinary can detect the form and flow of magic. I think this sister must feel it the same way as I do.”

Scroll nodded and said with a smile, “Indeed, it allowed me to find a lot of companions in the vast sea of people.”

“Do you know how rare such extraordinaries are?” Nightingale said.

Hearing that the other’s concern was about the frequency of extraordinaries, rather than “What are extraordinaries”... Ashes thought to herself, how could it be that the Witch Cooperation Association had already heard about an extraordinary? This term is strictly banned by the Church. After all, their abilities are directly affecting their own body and with this aren’t suppressed by the God’s Stone of Retaliation. Any person who got into contact with an extraordinary was the number one enemy for the Church.

“There will be one extraordinary witch for everyone thousand other witches,” Ashes was still thinking about the previous issue, but her face was still unreadable like always, “So far, with the addition of Scroll, I have seen only three people.” After pausing for a moment, Ashes asked, “By the way, I remember that the name of the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association was Cara. How is she?”

“She is dead,” Nightingale shook her head, “She died during the search for the Holy Mountain.”

“... That’s a real pity,” Ashes expressed her condolences in a

small voice, but what she really was concerned about at the moment was that the other side hadn't shown much sadness when Nightingale had answered her question. "Who is your new leader right now?"

"Let 's go back to town first," Nightingale just smiled, "You will see him soon."

...

They walked into the town like any ordinary civilian, giving Ashes the feeling that there was something wrong. How could it be that the witches of the Witch Cooperation Association are able to just walk along the streets while holding torches? And what was even more unexpected was that the town wasn't dead after nightfall. Behind the paper windows of many residences, she could see the outline of weak fires, like candles burning. Listening carefully, she could even hear many children reading aloud.

Candles, although this kind of item can't be called expensive, shouldn't be easily affordable with civilians' limited savings. They wouldn't be able to buy many of them, so they couldn't easily be used. Seeing that the town actually had this many residents lighting up candles at night was such an incredible scene to look at. Also, judging by the constant word-for-word reading, are they all trying to teach their children how to read?

However, since the others didn't mention this strange behavior with a single word, Ashes was too lazy to ask herself. Anyway, here isn't the place where we will live in the future, the only thing I have to do is to take you away from here as soon as possible.

After many turns along the way, the group was getting closer to the castle area, allowing Ashes to see the walls and the patrolling guards even in the dark night. “Where are we going?” She couldn’t stop herself from asking.

But to her shock the answer she got from Nightingale was, “To Border Town’s Castle, it is right in front of us.”

“Wait,” she slowed down. “That is the place where the Lord lives.”

“Well, it is also the home of us witches.”

“Were you able to reach an agreement with the Lord?” Ashes frowned. Even if the local forces were vigorous and coordinated, it was still difficult to face the Church with their God’s Stone of Retaliation. So, the only possibility for cooperation between a local lord and the witches was when the witches had their own way out, assuring them that they would survive. Unfortunately, when having to deal with such a vulnerable group of witches, most lords were reluctant to sit down and talk fairly about the conditions of the contract. It was more often that they endlessly squeezed them dry and demanded more, so the road to reaching an agreement with local Lords was usually blocked.

“I suppose you could call it that,” Nightingale said in a voice without any trace of depression. Rather, it was full of warmth, “Every one of us has signed a contract with His Royal Highness.”

Ashes wasn't able to feel happiness for them. Those contracts written with paper and pen were not binding at all. As soon as the Lord became tired of paying them or wanted to terminate their relationship of equality, he only had to knead the contract into a ball and throw it into the fireplace. There would be no one who would fight for the injustice the witches would have to face. Their status was like a small boat alone in a storm, always afraid of getting overturned.

Fortunately, now I'm here, she thought. With me, they can leave from here and go to the other side of the sea. There, us witches have built our own homes and live far away from the Church and any other secular threats.

Sure enough, when they stepped through the castle's gates, the guards just nodded and said hello when they saw the appearance of the witches.

Compared to the king's palace, the Lord's castle in Border Town was undoubtedly much smaller and darker. There were so few solitary torches burning on the walls of the corridor that their swaying lights weren't able to cover the entire stone floor. Walking along the dark corridors, Ashes got a depressing feeling. However, this feeling only lasted until they reached the entrance to the living room. There, the room was suddenly brightly lit up by fires.

Entering the hall, Ashes could see some more witches. It seemed they had all been waiting for her, and the moment she stepped into the room they began to applaud and welcome her. Nightingale, who wanted to give a brief introduction, took two steps forward,

but suddenly one of the witches who had previously waited in the room rushed over.

“Wendy!” somebody cried.

Everything that happened was registered by Ashes, but she still decided not to take any counter-measures. After all, she only had the feeling of joy and surprise from the approaching witch, there was no trace of hostility at all. So after a few seconds, she was embraced by a warm body.

“You survived,” said an unknown voice, excitedly. “Thank you for saving me.”

Ashes became confused, “you are...”

“My name is Wendy,” the voice said, releasing her hands. She took a deep look into Ashes’ eyes. “The little girl in the choir, do you remember me?”

...

On the second floor in one of the bedrooms, only two people were left, Ashes and Wendy.

Ashes had never expected to meet a partner from the monastery here.

So, calling her partner was a very far stretch. With the exception of that night, Ashes had never had any interaction with Wendy. In fact, she hadn't even paid any attention to the other girls enclosed with her in that underground room. She had not even realized that there were others who had to go through the same horrible acts of people forcing themselves on them. Even more, she had never thought that one of them would also become a witch.

"I was able to flee from the monastery and settle down in the Seawind region," Wendy began to talk, after a long time of silence she continued, "Then someday I got the news that the monastery was set on fire later that day, and that all the children were missing. Did you do that?"

"The fire?" Ashes shook her head, "It was the Church's doing. They did it to cover up the whole scandal. I killed some of the managers and the Army of Judges who tried to stop me until... members of the Church's God Punishment Army arrived. That scar over my eye was left by one of them. If hadn't chosen to escape by myself and had instead waited until the follow-up – if I had to face more members of the God's Punishment Army, I am afraid I would have died that day."

"God's Punishment Army?" Wendy stared with big round eyes at Ashes, "Who are they?"

Chapter 158 - Ashes (Part 2)

“They are the most excellent warriors of the Church and are used as the top secret weapon against us witches” Ashes explained, “they have the same amount of strength as I, and neither are they any slower than I am, also...” she hesitated. “It seems they don’t have their own conscious. When I was fighting against them, I was able to cut off the right hand of one of the soldiers from the God’s Punishment Army. But he didn’t hesitate for even one second to use his left hand to slash at my eye.

“Even when I turned and fled, his movements weren’t affected in any way by the wound I’d given him. This doesn’t have anything to do with having a strong fighting will. Even if they were able to keep fighting after losing one arm, they would still be affected in the end, for example something like losing their balance, it is simply impossible to adapt to that in such a short period of time.

“I’ve only heard of the Church’s Army of Judges,” Wendy whispered. “Since they have such powerful warriors, why did they never appear during the previous fights against witches?”

“That, I do not know,” Ashes slowly revealed, “Even I only heard the name ‘God’s Punishments Army’ after I later returned to the Old Holy City and inquired about it from some of the city’s inhabitants.”

“You... you went back?” Wendy asked surprised.

“Ah, how could I let those dregs off so easily?”

She stood up and went to the window, “later on I attacked several small churches and camps of the Army of Judges. During one of the raids I caught one of their presiding Judges, previously I had actually thought that they weren’t afraid of death. But having to face torture and death, his performance wasn’t much better than that of any ordinary person, he soon showed a look of fear and began to plead with me for mercy. It was from his mouth, that I heard the name of the God’s Punishment Army for the first time.

“Before their ceremony they were all members of the Army of Judges, only the best of the warriors will get this honor, and their acceptance must be voluntary. It seems there is a strong relationship between the success rate and their willingness. The big difference between the soldiers of the God’s Punishment Army and us are that they do not get their power naturally or because of their natural talents, no, instead they become transformed artificially.”

“...” Hearing this news, Wendy was quite shocked, she became utterly speechless.

“I suppose the reason why they cannot openly use them during wars, like they do with the Army of Judges, is perhaps because of the side effects of their transformation. When they lose their self, then there is no difference between them and the monsters.”

Ashes sighed, “During the time I was carrying out my revenge I would often hide myself within a deep well or sewers during the day, only coming out in the evening to start my attack against the believers. But when the Church began a complete city wide search,

I decided that I had to flee from the Old Holy City. On the day of my retreat, the blood on me was tightly sticking to my clothes and my skin, giving me a very grim appearance. Probably, looking at me out of the eyes of an outsider, I wouldn't have looked any differently than a mindless beast."

She only stopped her speech when she suddenly felt a hand on her shoulder, "Now, that time doesn't matter any longer. Here you can live the good life of an ordinary person. Under the Prince, the life of me and my sisters has become very good. After gaining the experience of fighting together during the Months of Demons and later, after repelling the Longsong Strongholds attack, the largest part of the town's people have already accepted the existence of us witches. This town has turned out to be the Holy Mountain we have always been searching for."

Ashes leaned against the window and took a deep look at the woman in front of her. She couldn't detect any sign of the thin women with dull eyes that she remembered from her life in the monastery. Looking at Wendy, it was quite hard for her to imagine that she had ever looked like she did during her childhood. Both in body and appearance, when they were compared with the child of that time, it was completely different. Moreover, the gentle and natural tone of her voice made others feel a peaceful serenity.

However, there were still some words which had to be said, "I won't be staying here, nor was that the reason that I've come to Border Town." She paused, "I came to this town, to take all of you with me away from here, taking you to a place which is really safe, unlike Border Town which isn't such a place."

“You do not want to stay here...” Wendy froze for a moment.
“Why?”

“As long as we live on this continent, we will always be threatened by the Church. Because of this, Tilly had gathered the majority of the witches living in the Kingdom of Graycastle and has taken them with her to the Fjords. That is where she intends to build her own country.”

“Doesn’t the Fjord also have Churches?”

“Because of the special topography of the archipelago and its separation into many islands, their influence can only be maintained on some of the bigger islands, and also...” Ashes twisted her mouth, “there aren’t any soldiers of the God’s Punishment Army on these islands either.”

And if they found themselves there, they would soon have to face the wrath of the witches. Going from one island to another, the Church’s forces would be uprooted, just like when they had hunted us witches.

“You and your sisters must also leave, Wendy,” she continued to try persuading her. “It was a mistake to spread those rumors, you should get rid of them as soon as possible. When I could hear them, the Church definitely has also heard of them, and they will never allow the witches to organize themselves. I don’t think that it will be long before the Church’s Army of Judges destroys the Kingdom of Graycastle. When you have to face the God’s Punishment Army, do you really believe that the 4th Prince will protect you? No secular Lord will ever be willing to spend his own life to save a

witch's. Right at this moment, he may still be good to you, but in times of distress, he won't hesitate for even a second before abandoning you."

After Ashes' speech, Wendy kept silent for a long time, before opening her mouth and declaring: "I do not know what the thoughts of my other sisters are, but I won't leave Border Town!"

"At the moment, you're standing at the edge of an overhanging cliff," Ashes frowned, "and with every day you wait it will become even more dangerous."

"If you want to avoid the impending danger, leaving the town, leaving His Highness, what difference would there be between your approach and when he would leave us? I do not want to be such a person, and..." She took a deep breath, "Furthermore, in the case that His Highness ever had to face against the pressure of the Church, I do not believe that he would ever act as you've predicted. Nightingale has already asked him the same question, and His Highness's then answered, 'I will make this town a place where every witch can live a life of an ordinary person, even if I have to become the enemy of the Church.' "

"..." Ashes was unable to respond, she didn't know what to say, she had already heard too many promises such as this, and even if the other party really was willing to protect the witches, in the end, what would that even change? In the face of such an overwhelming power, it would only end up increasing the number of sacrifices.

Until now she still had to grasp the situation regarding the Witch

Cooperation Association, more accurately the death of the Snake Witch Cara. It seemed that the surviving members of her former group have all been fully integrated into Border Town by the Lord. Spreading the news of a safe heaven up to Silver City wasn't done by one of the surviving witches, but rather by one of the Lord's own guards. Although she did not know what cunning plans he had, and how he had managed to make the witches trust him, but under the threat of her greatsword, his carefully constructed camouflage would all soon fall apart, most likely.

"I want to talk to your Lord, Roland Wimbledon," Ashes finally said.

...

Her appointment to see the Prince was scheduled for the next morning.

By that time, Ashes was brought into the office by Nightingale, now having to face this disgusting man once again.

Although she didn't want to admit it, it was clearly visible to her that Tilly and the Prince both shared the same blood. They both had the same long gray hair with a simple beam in the back of their head that during the sunlight of dawn would have a small touch of silver to it. The symbol of the royal family of the Kingdom of Graycastle. His forehead and nose were also somewhat similar to Tilly's and the more similarities Ashes found, the more she disliked him.

Comparing his previous appearance at the courts with the normal appearance he showed now, she had to say that his dress today was unusually clean. Furthermore, in addition to well-fitting clothes, she could detect almost no signs of wealth, such as jewelry, earrings, necklaces, rings, and bracelets. Even though he was just simply sitting on his chair, Ashes still had the feeling that he was looking down on her.

The aura of a leader.

She couldn't stop this thought from appearing.

Well, if only taking his outwards appearance into consideration, he really seems to have taken a step in the right direction, Ashes thought coldly in her heart. But it won't be much longer that you will be able to maintain such a posture.

"Welcome, I heard your name is Ashes?" The other side took the initiative to start the conversation, "You are a messenger sent by my sister, aren't you?

"It was my own decision to come to Border Town."

"But you can still be called her messenger, right?"

"..." Ashes frowned, why was he so emphasizing on her role as a messenger? She did not want to be entangled in such insignificant banter, "I could."

“Well, Ashbringer,” he said, revealing an unrecognizable smile,
“I hear you want to take my witches away?”

Chapter 159 - The Most Powerful Persuasion

Before Roland had agreed to the meeting, he had already heard every part of the talk between Wendy and Ashes.

He didn't expect that the long-lost Tilly Wimbledon would suddenly become the leader of another witch organization. Not only that, but she had set all of this up right in front of all of them. No, she had even gathered most of the witches in the whole kingdom. What was even more intolerable was, that she was now actually wanted to put her claws into his own territory.

According to the information gathered by Nightingale, the witch in front of him was an extraordinary, and her ability most likely belonged to the combat type.

Any witch who belonged to the kind of extraordinary had to be treated with the utmost care. So, when Roland was meeting with Ashes in his office, not only was Nightingale hiding in her fog, no, even Anna was standing by his side. She had placed several tiny black fires around his desk, all of which were completely invisible to the naked eye. Cutting off the area between the two sidewalls. As long Ashes dared to rush towards him, she would definitely end up cutting herself into many thin pieces.

Even so, Ashes was an extraordinary witch, she still wasn't wearing the God's Stone of Retaliation, but once she put on one of those stones, she would then turn into an unrestricted destructive power. Fortunately, the God's Stone of Retaliation was hated by the majority of witches, and she was most probably also taking this aspect into account. So Ashes didn't carry such a stone when she

was trying to win over the witches in Border Town.

“Your witches? Don’t be so arrogant, they are all living people, they aren’t your personal belongings!” Ashes declared coldly.

Roland got shocked by her unexpected words. This was the first time that he had to feel the feeling of defeat during a battle of words. He had already become used to calling them my people, my subjects and the like, but now he had unexpectedly face democratic criticism, letting him feel extremely embarrassed. Although his words were in accordance with the usual practice of this era, the people or items in the Lord’s territory, after all, belonged to the Lord, so calling them his wouldn’t bring any problems. But if he was to now stress this point in front of Nightingale and Anna, it would only show that his EQ was low, and he’d just be jumping into an already prepared pit.

So, he coughed twice, and tried to get the flow of the conversation into a positive direction for himself: “I never thought of them like that, they only stay in the town because they want it. But I have to point out, that I myself believe that this place is still the best place for them to live on freely. As for living in the Fjords as you have offered, not to mention that the trip itself would already be very dangerous, crossing over the whole Kingdom – no, the Fjords climate is also unpredictable, always having to fear tsunamis or perineal storms. That is simply not a suitable place for people to live in”.

“But there at least, the power of the Church would be at a minimal. Furthermore, the witches can rely on their powers to transform their homes, making them safe against any natural

disasters. But there is no way in which you could shield them against the strength of the God's Stone of Retaliation, not to mention the God's Punishment Army." Ashes mercilessly countered, "Do you know how foolish it was for you to do what you have done? Spreading the news of your witches will only lead to a visit from the Church.

"With respect, you have no way to win against the God's Punishment Army. Now, the right choice for you would be to let your witches leave your territory so that you can all avoid the tragedy that your actions is leading you towards."

Roland had already heard her telling Wendy about the God's Punishment Army, so he knew that using force to persuade her would be many times more effective than him using words. Of course, he could also simply ignore Ashes, but in that way, he would already be giving up the fight for the witches that are under Tilly Wimbledon's influence. So, despite only having just a small hope of achieving his goal, he still wanted to give it a shot.

"Are you able to fight against several soldiers of the God's Punishment Army at the same time?" Roland asked.

Ashes facial complexion became clearly puzzled, but in the end, she still stretched out three fingers, "Three soldiers, I'm able to defeat."

"Then let's have a fight," Roland said, sitting straight and becoming seriously. "The test will determine if I'm able to win against the God's Punishment Army or not."

“What do you mean?” Ashes became stunned for a moment, her cold face finally showed a different expression than her usually cold face.

“A fair test, a fight one-on-one,” Roland said, stressing word for word, “If I’m able to beat you, you have to accept that I have the ability to resist the Church.”

“You and I? Or... or do you want one of your witches to take your place?”

“Of course it won’t be me, but it won’t be a witch either. The soldiers of the God’s Punishment Army will all be wearing a God’s Stone of Retaliation,” Roland smiled, “Your opponent will be an ordinary knight.”

Although he regretted it a bit that he would not personally be taking part in it, the other side was a witch with a military strength completely off the charts, from the description he had heard from Wendy, she alone was powerful enough to make her way through a whole monastery, and in the end, was even able to escape from the pursuit of the God’s Punishment Army.

Even fighting empty-handed or with only a wooden sword, she would still be extraordinarily lethal. The actual effectiveness of a revolver was still unknown. And for the sake of safety, he had decided to give this great task to Carter. If he had been able to lay his hands on an ak47, then Roland would have tried to take her on by himself.

“Ordinary Knight...” Ashes face once more turned back to her original expression of indifference. “If I win, you will let the witches follow me?”

“Of course not, after all, you cannot offer the same. In the case I would win, you surely wouldn’t go back to Tilly and bring all of her witches to Border Town, right?”

“In that case, what would be the significance of your suggested duel?”

“I already said it previously, it’s not a duel, it’s a test,” Roland corrected her, “the significance lies in the fact that you will know, that in the face of the Church’s power I’m not without any possibilities to resist. Furthermore, when you later go back to the Fjords you will remember, that outside of the Fjords, there is also the Western Territories, and more precisely Border Town, that can provide a place for witches to live. Of course, if you win, it could be that Wendy will start to persuade the others, which would be many times more efficient than you doing it by yourself.”

“I will never lose,” Ashes declared. “Now call your knight.”

“Not now,” Roland waved his hand, “we will hold the test in a week. I have to make the necessary preparations first, until then you can freely live in the castle. Experiencing with the other witches, how it is feels to live in Border Town. And as a witch with a feeling for the town life, perhaps you will even change your opinion without us having to have a fight.”

“...” Ashes looked at the Prince coldly for a long time, but then she finally nodded, “You are right, maybe I won’t have to wait for seven days, they will change their view even earlier, freely leaving Border Town together with me.”

Roland just shrugged his shoulders in answer.

When the other was already at the door, he suddenly called to her once more, “Hold on... Can it be that I already have seen you from somewhere?”

Although he was certain that he had never seen her face before, her stature as he looked at her from behind, he got a strange feeling of familiarity. Roland could also slightly recall something, a sense of familiarity that seemed to be coming from... the time he had been living in the King’s Palace.

“Didn’t your guard already tell you?” Ashes didn’t even look back at him. “If it were not for Tilly who stopped me at that time, I’m afraid you’d now only have one hand left.”

The moment the door was closed, Nightingale appeared in front of him, and asked with a frosty voice, “You touched her ass?”

“What?” Roland became startled, “I can’t remember to have ever seen such a person in the palace, and what do you mean with ‘touched’? ”

Nightingale showed a dissatisfied look, there was naturally “Tyre” – to hell with it, although I really have touched the maid’s ass, if I answer this question I’m afraid I would be showing some flaws, furthermore what is wrong with feeling something up with your hands! After all, I also don’t care about your peeping habits!

“Keke,” Anna interrupted their conversation. “Are you sure that Carter will be able to beat her? If he fails, it may affect the others witches confidence in you.”

Fortunately, it seemed that Anna was still calm, Roland discovered in relief, “Even though an enhanced witch is not affected by the God’s Stone of Retaliation, she still has to fight with their own body. Comparing this with the quick fire of hot weapons, the limitations of the body will always be too big in comparison, I think the odds that we win is at least around 70%.”

But for that I will have to finish the development of the ammunition by next week, Roland thought.

Chapter 160 - Confrontation

Roland had already corrected designs for the Revolver's bullet a long time ago. After all, circular lead bullets and loose gunpowder were an arrangement that was simply too archaic. Taking Anna's processing capacity into account, it should be feasible for her to directly manufacture the shell for the ammunition. The problem was that there didn't exist a reliable primer, which could light the cartridge of the bullet that was filled with black powder.

The outer shell of the ammunition was generally made out of mercury fulminate which was very sensitive to impacts. When the firing pin was pulled and it hit the base of the bullet, the mercury fulminate would ignite, which would ignite the black powder, ejecting the bullet from the chamber.

It was such a pity that even after breaking his head over it, he still couldn't recall the necessary raw materials he needed for the mercury fulminate. From a literal point of view, he would definitely need nitric acid and mercury. However, if he looked at the result of the chemical equation he had written down, it became apparent that these two substances would only produce nitric acid together.

In addition, knowing the raw materials wasn't equally to having a smooth production of usable products. Roland would still have to discover the right concentration and temperature for the reactive process, and whether he still needed to add another catalyst or not add one, was also a crucial point he had to figure out before finishing the product.

Moreover, because of the sensitive properties of mercury, manufacturing it was considered a very dangerous process and if it exploded one could easily lose some fingers, so Roland was afraid of trying it out personally.

So, Roland had to settle for the second-best option, using a metal ammunition case but keeping the old flintlock ignition, which would require that the spark could enter the interior of the ammunition case to ignite the gunpowder. Therefore, he had to leave a hole at the bottom of the ammunition case, but he still had to find a method which would prevent leakage of black powder.

Obviously, these two points were contradictory to each other: the greater the opening, the faster the leakage of gunpowder. Yet if the opening is too small, it would become too difficult for the spark to ignite the gunpowder.

He needed something that would allow the spark to ignite the powder, while at the same time blocking the hole, to prevent the leakage of gunpowder.

Roland first thought was pyroxylin, which was also known as nitrocellulose.

It was also one of the few chemicals which he still remembered and could also be used for weapons because it had such a simple production method: the cotton had just to be soaked in two strong kinds of acids. The two acids it used were the commonly available sulfuric acid and nitric acid, and there would be no danger involved in producing them. Even though he still had wanted to wait for, the hopefully soon, arriving alchemist, but now, where he

had the deadline of seven days, he decided to roll up his sleeves and get to work.

Taking the quill, Roland began to write down the idea he had already in his head for a long time.

The first ingredient he needed was cotton, and the best cotton yarn were the ones which weren't weaved or dyed and it was exactly this kind that he had brought back with him from his visit to the Duke's castle, and was now also piling up within his castle's warehouses. Cotton yarn needed to be skimmed. Otherwise the grease attached to its surface would prevent the nitrification.

He was already familiar with the stuff required for removing the oil, it was sodium hydroxide, which was also commonly known as caustic soda. At the same time, it was also one of the raw materials needed for making soap: For producing soap, one had to add fat to caustic soda, and then stir it until it became solid. Afterward it could be used as washing soap. But Roland has been too busy developing the industrial and agricultural technology and with defending Border Town against foreign enemies, that he hadn't found any time to invent any such commodities.

As for how he was meant to produce caustic soda, the simplest method would probably be the electrolysis of salt water. So the Prince discovered, that in order to create the new types of bullets, he first had to develop a DC Generator.

Ashes was walking along the Redwater River, feeling somewhat

depressed.

Since the other witches knew that she had come to Border Town to bring the witches of the Witch Cooperation Association away, their attitude towards her had cooled down, a lot, and there was no longer any signs left of the warm welcome she had received last night.

Moreover, she had also noted that most of the witches were practicing their ability in the castle backyard, which showed that Roland had also found a way to avoid the suffering from the demonic bite. Originally, Ashes had wanted to use this vital piece of intelligence to show her good will to the other witches, but her plan was unexpectedly shattered right from the beginning. So in addition to telling them the disadvantages and advantages of leaving Border Town, she had nearly nothing else left for persuading them to move.

What surprised Ashes the most was, even though Roland Wimbledon's appearance had changed very little since the time she last saw him, every gesture from him now contained an indescribable temperament, completely out of tune with the image he previous held of being a dandy.

How could this be? He had previously definitely belonged to the incompetent class, during business appointments he would always think first about finding a way to escape, never standing up for others, and even if the problem was clearly caused by him, he was also too afraid to take on any responsibility. That time when he had thought about harassing her, she only needed to throw him a hateful look, to make him fall to the ground in panic. But she had

later heard from Tilly, that he had claimed that he had fallen by accidentally, and that the 5th Princess was at fault for it. After all why would she even find such an ugly woman as a guard?

From that time on, Ashes' view of the 4th Prince had fallen to the lowest possibility ranking.

Previously, she had believed that such a type of person would be easy for her to handle, but during today's negotiation she had failed utterly to gain the upper hand. Especially when the other side suggested a one-on-one competition, she had discovered that her threat of using military force didn't work any longer, since the other side hadn't thought about escaping. Instead, it might even have had the complete opposite effect. If she had threatened him at that time personally, in addition to reducing the witch's positive impression of her, it would not have had any other results.

Ashes sighed, if she just could be as smart as Tilly, every problem that appeared before her could have been all smoothly solved. The moment she encountered a situation such as this, she would surely have been able to come up with a solution to this, right?

If she hadn't wanted to help Tilly as much as possible, Ashes really would have taken the next ship heading to Silver City and also leave the Kingdom of Graycastle as soon as possible.

Unconsciously, she had already left the area of the town, she was no longer be able to see those green wheat field on the other side of the river, but instead she was looking at the unclaimed woodland.

When Ashes was already ready to turn back, she suddenly felt the fluctuation of magic behind her, subconsciously turning her head, she could barely see a knife heading towards her cheek, taking advantage of her horizontal movement. The magic fluctuation had transformed into a surging billow, and Ashes suddenly felt a piercing pain coming from her cheek, the other person's systematic and logical moves were clearly nothing like one would expect to come from an ordinary person. Ashes no longer hesitated, completely dumping her passive attitude, to concentrate on avoiding the dagger coming to her from the front, she put all her strength on one foot and catapulted out of the way.

However, the other side just disappeared into thin air, and within a blink of an eye, she had already appeared behind herself, leaving Ashes totally unable to follow her opponent's movement.

She drew her sword and rotated in a circle. Turning so fast that she created a dull whistling sound with the sword, causing a large amount of dust to raise up from the ground. This attack from her had no dead areas and was able to scoop up any kind of threat, but in front of this unknown enemy she was facing, even this tricky attack of hers ended in a complete failure. When her swords swept through the attacker's previous position, there was nothing to be touched.

That's bad, she thought to herself, straining all of the muscle in her body, ready to react to the next round of attacks from the other side, but the shadow just disappeared from in front of her.

The dust settled down slowly, while the person again appeared near Ashes, playing with the dagger she was holding in her hand.

It was Nightingale.

“Should I see this as a warning?” Ashes frowned.

“Of course not,” Nightingale said, putting her dagger back to her waist. “I just wanted to see the strength of an extraordinary.”

“Are you sure? It was more like...”

“Do you think I would force you into leaving Border Town quickly, or otherwise I would not stay polite with you?” Nightingale interrupted her. “If that was the case, what would be the difference between Cara, and me?”

Cara? Why would she mention the former leader of the Witch Cooperation Association? Ashes asked herself in confusion.

“You can rest assured that I won’t hinder you from approaching any of my sisters, and if someone is willing to leave with you, I don’t think His Royal Highness will stop you. I certainly would not...” Nightingale paused, “But if you threaten to hurt His Highness, I guarantee you that next time I won’t just be stabbing at your side anymore.” Here she grinned and then disappeared into thin air, “Enjoy your time in Border Town.”

Sure enough, you still warned me off, ah, Ashes shook her head.

Chapter 161 - Alchemy And Chemistry

The principle behind a DC Generator and its structure was very simple. During his childhood, Roland had once taken apart more than a dozen four-wheel drive motors. From the ordinary stock motors, to the legendary golden panther, and also the build it yourself type hand rotators made out of copper wire. These motors were all considered to be regular DC motors.

There was no difference in the structure of DC Generators and DC Motors, at their essence, they were all the same thing, their function was interchangeable. As long as there was another machine to help the rotator of the DC Motor rotate, and causing the wire to continuously cut through the magnetic induction line, it could continue to generate and induce an electrical current without end.

With the help of Anna and Mystery Moon, Roland needed only half a day to finish assembling a simple DC motor. All the parts of the stator were made out of wood and then given to Mystery Moon for her to magnetise them. The rotor was made of a wooden log with commutators embedded at the tip of both ends. The rotor would be connected by a shaft to the steam engine through a hole in the center. This structure was very convenient to produce, but at the same time it also ensured that the commutators would be isolated from each other.

As for the new steam engine, Roland and Mystery Moon just stood to the side and looked on as Anna performed her incredible processing techniques. If they needed to make larger parts, she would spread out her black fire, wrap it like a cover around a bunch of ingots and let them melt within the cover. She would

then mold the iron into the required sizes. Afterward, she only needed to cut out the right form.

On the next day, when Roland was ready to go to the calcining room in his backyard to test out the generator's effectiveness, the guards also brought him some very pleasant news. The Chief Instructor of Silver City's Alchemy Workshop had come to Border Town, and also, there was more than one other person that had come with him.

Kyle Sichi acted in a very decisive manner, in the afternoon, on that very same day he took his family and more than a dozen disciples with him and boarded on the next merchant ship heading towards Border Town. Unfortunately, Chavez had ended up hesitating for a long time, but in the end, decided to reject Kyle's invitation.

Kyle hadn't disclosed the contents of the letter to any of the other alchemists since the more people who knew about it, the later the departing time would have to be scheduled. Kyle worried that it wouldn't take very long before the news about his success in reproducing Crystal Glass would reach the Duke's ear, and if by then he still wanted to go out, now after becoming known to have the ability to create high-profit luxury products, the Duke certainly want to keep him firmly under his control.

He had written down the formula for crystal glass and its firing method on paper, then stored it in the formula cupboard of the refining room. This would in turn also give the Duke the opportunity to heavily invest in the production of crystal glass and

in so doing also invest in the Alchemy Workshop indirectly. But comparing it with learning about the truth of alchemy, whether it was the recipe of crystal glass or the Alchemy Workshop in general, they both wouldn't even be worth mentioning.

Five days later, Kyle finally had the opportunity to see the author of the letter, Roland Wimbledon.

Right now they were in the castle's reception hall, and Kyle had just finished giving his greeting, but even before he had placed his butt on the chair, he couldn't stop himself any longer from speaking out. "Your Highness, I would like to have a friendly conversation with your alchemist."

"My alchemist?" Hearing his question the Prince just grinned "Before you came to Border Town, we had no alchemist here, but from now on you are my alchemist."

"You mean ... those alchemical formulas, were written by you?" Kyle suddenly thought of another possibility, my counterpart is a prince, who has received all his knowledge from private teachers and other mentors. So, if he knows about these formulas, doesn't this mean that King's City Alchemy Workshop had already known about the essence of alchemy for a long time? And we, in our delusion thought we were finally getting ahead of them, now that seems to be just utterly ridiculous.

"Not exactly," Roland said. "These formulas came from an ancient book which were written more than four hundred years ago and were recently discovered by me. It seems that hundreds of years ago they called alchemy 'chemistry'."

“What...” When Kyle heard that the formulas didn’t come from King’s City’s Alchemy Workshop, his heart suddenly felt a lot better. But the Prince’s answer still surprised him. An alchemy book that was more than 400 years old? One had to know that even the King’s City’s Alchemic Workshop only had a history of less than 200 years, could it be that the later generation will also look at our inventions?

“Yes, in the book, those scholars had formulated a hypothesis, which they called, “The Theory of the immortality of matter.” It states that matter which is the source of all things in the world will neither disappear nor will it increase. It will only transfer from one form to another. But in the end, they are all a piece of the same cake,” Roland pointed to a cake placed on a nearby table, “If you eat that, it will enter your stomach, from there some of the parts of which it’s formed will be absorbed by you, becoming a part of your body, while the rest of it will be excreted. So, if you now would take the integrated parts and the expelled parts and compare them with the former cake, the quality of the matter should still be the same.”

“Hold on... Your Royal Highness,” Kyle expressed his thoughts, “If I take a piece of wood, cut it and burn it to ashes, no matter how much it previously weighed, the weight of the ashes after the fire will be lighter than that of the former piece of wood. If the matter didn’t disappear, then where did it go?”

“These problems are also explained in the books,” Roland said laughingly. “The missing matter was turned into gas and water, and the water was heated up so much that it turned into gas as well and evaporated. So, in the end, you can only see the residue from

what was left behind.”

“Gas?” Kyle got an unexplainable feeling in his heart, “Do you want to say that the air also has a weight?”

“Of course, the air also has mass.” The Prince nodded in confirmation, “It is also very easy to verify this point, just put a pile of sawdust into a bottle, then cover the bottle and place it on a scale. Afterward, you set the sawdust in the bottle on fire and weigh it again. You will eventually discover, that the weight of the bottle hasn’t changed. This is because the gas had no way out and still remains inside the bottle.”

“This... was this also written in the ancient books?” Kyle eagerly asked, “Could you let me see that book?”

“You can, if you accept a few of my conditions first,” Roland gave him a piece of paper.

“You only have to name them.”

“First of, if you want to work for me, your salary will be calculated according to the regular payment of Silver City’s Alchemy Workshop. Secondly, once you accept this job, you must comply with the confidentiality regulations. That means, everything you learn has to remain a secret to other alchemists. Thirdly, if you agree to the terms, you have to sign this contract.

“The deal lasts for a period of five years and when the five years

are over, you are free to go on to choose your own fate. Furthermore, your alchemy discoveries won't be placed under the confidentiality restrictions any longer. You will be free to show your discoveries to your colleagues at the Alchemy Workshop. If you accept these three conditions, according to the contract, Border Town will provide you with free housing and a chemical laboratory. And lastly, I will lend you the book title "Elementary Chemistry" to study, and if there is something that you don't understand, you can always come and ask me."

These doesn't seem to be very harsh conditions, Kyle thought, although those words such as confidential regulations, chemical laboratory and so on are really hard to pronounce, I think I was able to grasp the general meaning, also, a five-year contract also isn't that long. Kyle had previously thought that the Price would make it a requirement that he would have to stay in Border Town forever.

And... even if he had demanded harsher conditions, Kyle would still have wanted to see the book with his own eyes, the book on which was recorded the essence of alchemy.

After he had thought it through, Kyle got up from his seat and bent his waist: "I'm willing to serve you, Your Royal Highness."

"Excellent, now we have a deal," the Prince did not seem to care about the etiquette, "Your workplace will be directly beside the Redwater River. After signing the contract, I will take you with me and have you familiarize yourself with the laboratory. I will be introducing you to the usage of the glassware and informing you about the workplace's rules."

Hearing all this, Kyle felt that there was something wrong with this situation, how can it be that the Prince is so skilled in alchemy, making people think that he is always keeping another card up in his sleeve? Shouldn't he be just some ordinary noble that found an ancient book and simply brushed up against alchemy?

However, these were all only minor details, he suppressed his doubts and asked, "Does Your Highness need me to refine something for you?"

"I do, I need a highly-concentrated acid. The higher the concentration, the better." The Prince replied.

Chapter 162 - Firearm Practice

“Liar.” When Roland had finished his appointment with the alchemist, he returned to his office. Nightingale asked, “What kind of four-hundred and fifty year-old ancient ‘Elementary Chemistry’ book are you talking about? Isn’t it just one of the books that contain some of your memories? Sooner or later, everything in it will be taught to the citizens anyway, right?”

“It was only a white lie.” During Margaret’s visit, she had presented a package of black tea to Roland. He could now finally do away with drinking water or ale every day.

“How could a prince who has lived his whole life in the palace know alchemy so well while having only had access to the teachings of the King’s Alchemist? But, if I were to rather give him a book so that he could study it himself, it would be more likely that he would accept the knowledge compared to if I were the one who was teaching him. After all, the one thing that humans trust the most will always be themselves.”

“Oh?” Nightingale became curious, she leaned her upper body closer to Roland and stopped herself directly in front of his face, “Then who was the one who taught you?”

“Uhh...” Roland opened his mouth, but Nightingale laid her finger on it, “If you do not want to give me an answer, just don’t say anything. I don’t want to hear a lie come from you.”

When Roland blinked with his eyes, Nightingale had taken back

her hand.

“We have to make use of the fact that the duel is still five days away,” Roland took this opportunity to change the subject, “we have to get Carter and allow him to get familiar with the new weapon.”

“But a short while ago, didn’t you complain that the ammunition problem still wasn’t resolved yet?”

“The problem only affects the actual use of pyroxylin. If we only want to take care of the competition, it should still be possible for us to fire the gun. After all, during the duel we won’t have to consider the transportation or the reloading, since ten rounds of ammunition should be enough to draw a result,” Roland explained.

Of course, the lack of gun-cotton would lead to a decrease in the rate of fire, which could also play an important part in the duel, but in the end it would all end up in the hands of Carter and his God like face.

To the west of the City Wall.

After accepting his new assignment given to him by Roland, Carter arrived at the explosives testing area once more.

“I’m supposed to be fighting against a witch?” Carter had been startled when he heard about the duel. “Can I wear a God’s Stone

of Retaliation?"

"Certainly," Roland smiled. "But unfortunately, you will be facing off against a unique type of witch who won't be affected by it, her method of fighting is also similar to that of a knight-she will even be using a greatsword."

"You mean to tell me, she's a witch that is a master at melee fighting?" Carter glanced at Nightingale who was standing beside Roland.

"More or less. But because her ability is of the self-strengthening type, regardless of whether it is her strength or her speed, they will all be far beyond that of an ordinary human." Roland continued.

"You have to be mentally prepared. Her control over her body and her power is several times greater than that of that death-row criminal after he took those pills."

"Several times greater... Your Royal Highness, do you know what this means?" Carter was shocked.

"I will most probably be unable to keep up with her reaction speed, even if I'm carefully observing her movements. If she is as powerful as you say she is, I am afraid I won't be able to beat her."

"Theoretically speaking, your chance of winning is actually zero," the Prince confirmed, but he then handed him a strange firearm, "but by using this weapon, your chances of winning

should increase dramatically.”

“This is... the new gun?” Carter grabbed the weapon with both hands. Because the trigger and the barrel parts were very similar to that of a flintlock, the knight was also able to determine that it should belong to the same type of weapon. Even though its size wasn’t as big as the former, after he held it in his hand it was still heavier than the former flintlock. Particularly noteworthy to him was that, with the exception of the handle, which was made out of wood, all the rest of the weapon was made out of metal. With its smooth lines and its sharp corners, as well as its light white metallic luster, the weapon was a thing of unspeakable beauty.

It was the first time he saw such a weapon, and he immediately fell in love with it.

“It is called a revolver,” Roland pulled out another weapon with the same shape, and let the beehive-like-wheel pop out to its left, “Now let me instruct you on how to use it.”

Carter soon found out that its operation was simpler than that of the flintlock gun. The projectile and gunpowder had already been integrated into one unit, and as long as the cylinder was loaded it would be ready to fire. There were five holes in the cylinder, which meant that each cylinder could be filled with up to five rounds of ammunition. This was probably also the reason why it was classed as a revolver.

There was a hole where the revolver’s hammer met the cylinder, if the hammer hit the hole, a spark would be created and a loud friction sound would then be heard. Maybe there is flint hidden

inside it, he thought. But this bullet's design really is much too incredible, this light-yellow shell is made out of a thin copper plate, and the body appears to be perfectly round but also totally smooth at the same time. I can't even see any cracks or gaps in the outer shell. The bullet's front is slender while its rear is as thick as my index finger. It fits very accurately into the holes in the cylinder. How were they able to produce this?

"The ammunition still isn't finished yet, so you have to always pay attention to the opening at the bottom of the bullet," Roland performed a shooting motion, "like me, you have to always keep pointing the muzzle downwards. Don't let the powder leak out from the opening. After each shot, you have to clean up the revolver's bullet nest, or else the scattered gunpowder will start to accumulate inside the hole."

"Unfinished goods?"

"Yeah," the Prince shrugged, "There is an important part that still needs to be resolved, but if everything goes well, we can finish it before the start of the duel. The hole at the bottom will then be sealed so that you will no longer need to worry about losing gunpowder."

When the bottom becomes sealed, how will be the gunpowder inside the bullet be ignited? Carter thought this, but soon decided not to think any further about this seemingly impossible problem. After all, he was not as knowledgeable as His Royal Highness, who knew so much.

That's right, he is erudite and multi-talented. At present, Carter

already admired the 4th Prince and prostrated himself in admiration. No matter if it were a master alchemist or an astrologer who held a high position at court, none of them had invented as many strange things in addition, all of Roland's products had a great value. His inventions were unlike Snow powder, which was the kind of invention that could only be used as a toy for the nobility.

The steam engine invented by His Royal Highness was currently being used for mining and pumping operations, and his guns and cannons helped repel the demonic beast and also the Duke's coalition. Now, Carter was already convinced that as long as he had enough time, the throne of the Kingdom of Graycastle would definitely end up in the hands of Roland Wimbledon – the great Lord of Border Town.

The distance to the target was ten meters, but apart from the issue with the distance, there was also the problem that the human-mark was only the size of one's hand. Carter took on a shooting stance in accordance with the teachings of His Highness. He then held the gun in both hands, leaned his body slightly forwards, aligned the barrel in line with the center of the target, and then pulled the trigger.

Sparks and gas were ejected from both sides of the wheel, and a loud noise hurt his ears. It felt like someone had shoved him backward, and his arms were also unconsciously pushed upwards. When the smoke finally cleared, the target still seemed to be intact.

“Go on,” said Roland.

Carter took a deep breath, and then fired the remaining four bullets. However, the result was still the same, no bullet had hit the target.

“This...” Carter was shaken, but when he looked to His Royal Highness, he discovered that the latter didn’t seem to care.

“With its shorter barrel, the pistol’s accuracy and range aren’t as good as the rifle’s, so it’s entirely reasonable for you to miss. Plus, the bullet’s diameter is close to twelve millimeters. With the diameter to be nearly twelve millimeters, the recoil also has to be much larger than from the flintlock.” The Prince began to explain, but Carter couldn’t understand what he wanted to say to him. “All in all, you only have to follow my instructions and keep on practising a lot. If one day, before the duel, you are able to hit the target with all the five bullets, you will really a chance to win. Oh, and that’s right... don’t forget to collect the bullet casings, they can be reloaded and used more than once.”

Chapter 163 - Maggie The Witch

Ashes sat at the top of the castle, waiting for the arrival of the day of the competition.

During the past few days, her attempts at persuading the other witches had not shown any progress. The stubbornness of the witches had greatly exceeded her expectations, whether it was the older women like Scrolls or the minors such as like Lily. They all refused her invitation. The only difference between them was their manner and reason in rejecting her.

Some chose to stay because of Roland, while others didn't want to leave the Witch Cooperation Association, but in the end the ten witches had all gathered together into turned into one unbreakable piece of iron. As for Anna and Nana, both of whom had originally come from Border Town, Ashes wasn't in the mood to even try to lure them away. In particular, when Ashes stood in front of Anna, the magic she could feel coming from her was completely different to anything else she had ever felt before. Her magic felt like it was as hard as steel, but at the same time it also had a smooth and dense feeling to it. It felt as if she was separated from Ashes by a wall of iron.

Among the many witches that Tilly had been able to gather, none of them had ever given her that feeling. After inquiring the other witches on this topic, she learned that Anna's way of controlling her flame was actually quite unique. However, how could it be, that even though her flame was invisible, it still felt as if there was a real barrier present? Ashes simply couldn't understand this.

As for Border Town, in comparison to the other towns and villages that Ashes had seen before, it was quite different. If she were to put it into words, Ashes would have to say that felt as if the town was full of vitality, and that the people here all seemed to be holding on to a purpose for each and every day.

From her position high up on top of the castle, she had a perfect panoramic view over the whole town. It seemed that at this moment, the most intense flow of people was in the area for the new houses. They had separated a square site as the new district, and within that area, every house looked similar to the next.

There was an endless stream of carriages continually bringing in new batches of bricks from the North of the town while the masons were starting to dig out the foundations for a dozen new similarly shaped houses. Soon after, they could start to raise the walls, which was all done surprisingly quickly. Within a day, the walls had already reached around the height of a child.

Looking into the Northeastern direction, she could see smoke constantly rising up into the sky. The smoke wasn't caused by a mountain fire, but rather was the workings of the brick kilns. In particular, there were several thick brick towers that had been erected, all of which at first glance, like a forest of colossal red tree trunks from the distance.

Looking in the direction of the river, she could see some of the several sailboats that were arriving at Border Town every day since she had been here. Most of these sailboats came from Longsong Stronghold and were all loaded with so many items that the unloaded goods would almost fill up the entire shipyard.

A group of guards were always patrolling around the yard while keeping those strange wooden pikes in their hands. Unlike the guards from some of the other cities' garrisons, they weren't walking around languidly for a short time before disappearing to find a place to hide and take a nap. No, they always marched in a straight line, moving between the terminal and the yard, and sometimes would even take the initiative to come forward and help to unload the ships, all of which Ashes had no memory of ever witnessing such a scene ever before.

What kind of spell had Roland Wimbledon used that had given these people so much enthusiasm for constructing this new town in such a barren and desolate land?

Just at that moment, from overheard, Ashes heard a burst of gugu sounds from a flock of birds. She raised her head and saw how a large fat pigeon dropped down from the sky and landed on her shoulder.

"Finally, I have found you," said the dove beside her cheek.

"Has Tilly sent you?" Ashes pulled some wheat corns from her pocket and threw them on the roof.

The Pigeon swooped right over, before suddenly realizing, "I'm not a bird, gurr!"

"After you turn back into a human we can speak again."

“Okay. goo,” when the voice faded, the pigeon’s feathers suddenly expanded, and released a white light from the gaps between its feathers. Its head moved up, followed by the rapid expansion of its body. Simultaneously, its feathers began to shrink and were turned into a bundle of long white hair.

No matter how many times she saw this happen, Ashes would always be amazed. Maggie’s ability as a witch, which allowed her to change into a variety of birds, besides the problem that she was quite fat in her bird form, was wonderful and charming ability. She would even sometimes long to have Maggie’s ability, rather than being an extraordinary who didn’t have to be afraid of the power of God’s Stone of Retaliation. She was much more eager to have the ability to travel from one place to another. With this ability, as long as she wanted to see Tilly, she could immediately go to her, no matter where Tilly was at the time.

“Even with the trace I could follow, it still wasn’t that easy to locate your position, ah,” Maggie’s entire body trembled as if she was drying her feathers, “The distance was so far that my magical stone statue couldn’t even sense the magical fluctuation coming from your mark. Fortunately, Shadow could still tell me your approximate whereabouts. When I flew over the Fallen Dragon Ridge, the magical stone finally showed some reaction.”

Apart from her symbolic white hair, the most noteworthy part of her was her short stature. She was supposed to be an adult, but only reached up to Ashes’ waist, and still had exact same appearance as a young girl. If she untied her white hair, it would almost cover her entire body.

“Has Tilly safely arrived in the Fjords?” Ashes sat down and patted at the tiles beside her. The other side, just like a bird, obediently came over.

“She took the Empress of the Sea and had a safe travel, but during the second trip a strong Northwind came up and pushed the ship against the shore, fortunately no witch was killed. The third and fourth ships are still at sea; the moment I heard of your travel I came over to find you.”

“That’s good.” Ashes could finally feel some relief, although she felt disgusted when she saw the Prince’s face, one thing he had said wasn’t wrong. He was right that the voyage from the Kingdom of Graycastle to the Fjords would be filled with danger. The weather on the sea could change far more rapidly than here on land, and at the same time, it could also be much more violent than on land. What was an entirely blue sky of pleasant winds just moments before could turn into a storm within the blink of an eye. Fighting against the overwhelming waves, her extraordinary power appeared to be negligible.

“You both say the same thing,” Maggie continued, “Shadow stated that you did not come back together with them because you wanted to recruit some new witches from Border Town. Rather than asking for more details, Lady Tilly just said ‘That’s good.’ ” She paused and took a look at her surroundings, “The new companions, where are they?”

“They do not want to leave,” Ashes sighed in regret and began to repeat her story. “Compared to me, they seem to believe in the

Lord of Border Town, who is Tilly's brother.”

“Lady Tilly was willing to accept us, and now even her brother is also prepared to take us in... ah, to me this doesn't seem to be bad, gurr,” she leaned over, “That being the case, shouldn't you already be on your way, on the road to the Fjords? Without your help, Lady Tilly cannot start the cleansing program.”

Ashes shook her head, “I still have to wait, I will leave immediately after the duel has finished.”

“But, you just said, even if you win, the other side still wouldn't take the initiative to accept your offer.” Maggie muttered, “So why do you have to complete this test?”

“If there is a chance, I still want to try,” Ashes answer came quietly. “The cleansing program has no immediate effect, but if I'm able to bring a witch with me, Tilly's strength will definitely increase.”

“Well,” Maggie nodded, “In that case. I will be staying here and wait for you so that we can both go back together, but there is still one thing you have to take note of. When I flew over the Fallen Dragon Ridge, I saw a group of riders flying the banner of the Church. They were about 10 strong.”

“That's isn't a very large number... If they are raising their flag, that must mean they belong to the Army of Judges,” Ashes said in a cold voice, “Except for Border Town, I don't think there is any other place near here that the Church would want to send their

envoys. Their noses are as sensitive as a dog's."

"All is well and good, we will keep this information to ourselves until I finish neatly defeating their knight. Afterward, I will tell him the news that the Church is approaching. Roland Wimbledon should finally realize what a terrible mistake he had made. How awesome would that be."

Chapter 164 - Highly Concentrated Acid

Kyle Sichi had hardly gotten any sleep these past few days, he had soon discovered that coming to Border Town had been the wisest choice in his life.

He had spent two full days and one night reading the complete book on “Primary Chemistry”, and now that he had started to read it once more. Even though he had only slept for two or three hours, it was more than enough for him to be full of energy. Now, as he returned back to the first page, he started to read the ancient book carefully once more.

Matter is made up of tiny particles! The changes of matter are from the decomposition and the recombination of those aforementioned particles! During the entire reaction process, the total amount of matter will always remain constant the entire time!

For goodness sake. What kind of person could write such a book? Unexpectedly there are people some people who could see the world in such details that they could narrate it so clearly. More than once did he suspect that the contents of the book were actually all a fabrication, but after he did some alchemy tests according to the example given, the results were all fully in line with what was written in the book! Moreover, not only did this work during the experiments, no, he had also frequently seen some example of this working in reality, all of which showed that what was written in the book was correct.

There were things such as “Oxygen” which was described in

Chapter 1.

This gas is one of the main components of air, people were not breathing air to live, but rather the oxygen that came with it. A flame also required oxygen, to be able to burn, the combustion was essentially a kind of oxidation reaction. The more oxygen the fire was supplied with, the more intense the combustion would be.

These words reminded him of the kilns they used in Silver City to burn glass. Two people had to constantly work on the blister bag in order to allow the furnace temperature to reach the level at which the gravel would start to melt. Since it was all made out of matter, this was also possible through alchemy... no, it was simply a chemical reaction drawn out from pure oxygen. If it were possible to supply the furnace with pure oxygen, couldn't the blast equipment also be left out?

And the most surprising part he had read in the book was that water was actually composed of two hydrogen particles and one oxygen particle. Which was probably also the reason why all creatures had to drink water. However, hydrogen seemed to be a gas, but when combined with oxygen which was also another type of gas, it became a liquid, how could this be possible?

Kyle discovered that he still had many questions left unanswered and also many things to consider, but there was no doubt that with this new knowledge he had already left the other alchemist far behind. While they were still searching for formulas in their world filled with chaos and a fog of obscurity, he instead had a flat and straight road directly before his eyes.

Whatever, I can leave this for later. Now, it is time to do some proper business. He finally closed the book, filled with reluctance. Looking out of the window he saw that at this point the horizon had already began to turn white, which meant that it was time for him to go to work.

Kyle blew out the candle, and when he approached the bedroom, he saw that both his wife and daughter were still busy sleeping. Afterward, he stepped out of the house and closed the door quietly behind him.

The house His Royal Highness had assigned to him laid in a district west of the castle. Comparing the new house with his former house in Silver City there were a lot of differences. The walls were now made out of brick instead of the quickly molding wood he had seen in Silver City. Furthermore, the house was also many times more comfortable and the kitchen utensils and furniture were all stocked with everything that they needed.

Although he hadn't spoken about it out loud, deep down he was much more satisfied with this new life. His disciples lived in another district, two blocks away from him. Their house was much smaller, and they didn't have a room for themselves. Their house was a bit like an inn, where a bedroom had to be shared with four people.

When he came to his laboratory at the Redwater River, he saw that his disciples have already been busy. They had all been carefully selected by Kyle. They had worked in the Alchemy Workshop almost from their childhood onwards, learning how to clean and sort the materials. By now all of them had already

reached an age between twenty and thirty years old. Seeing that all the laboratory utensils and shiny glass containers were clean, Kyle nodded in satisfaction.

“Good morning, Chief Instructor,” seeing him enter, all the disciplines bowed and greeted him.

“Let’s start.” Kyle took a pair of gloves from one of the cupboards, full of enthusiasm. These gloves were extremely slim and elastic. They were most probably made out of animal intestines.

When he had worked in the Alchemy Workshop before this, they never had any provisions such as these, but the Prince had repeatedly stressed how dangerous it was to work and experiment with the chemicals. So, all the operating rules had to be strictly followed, such as when working with corrosive materials, they had to wear gloves the whole time and keep all of the windows open.

Another difference between his previous work in the workshop and now was that he now had a clear task assigned to him. He had to make acid for His Royal Highness.

The double stone acid method had already been used by his disciplines many times before, so Kyle only had to visit them from time to time and no longer needed to guide them through each and every step of the way.

The two acids that they had to produce were described in detail in the book “Primary Chemistry”, one was called sulfuric acid, and

the other was called nitric acid.

During his time in the Alchemy Workshop they had used different names for them, the former had been known as green vitriol acid and the latter as niter acid. Even though they had used different names for it, the preparation method was basically still the same, through the dry distillation of green vitriol and saltpeter, they could get acid vapor and then by condensing them together, they were able to collect the needed acid liquid.

Green vitriol was usually mined together with sulfur, while there were special nitrate fields to satisfy the great demand of the big cities, so they were both a commonly found raw material.

But His Highness stressed the point that the two acid concentrations had to be as high as possible, so he had deliberately decided to explain the purification method to Kyle.

For example, the collected sulfuric acid could be heated up again, so that the remaining water evaporated until finally a concentration of up to 98% concentrated sulfuric acid could be reached.

However, nitric acid was a lot of more trouble. According to His Royal Highness, nitric acid itself wasn't stable, it was actually pretty volatile. Because of this, using the usual method they could achieve a high concentration only to a certain extent, and if it then came in contact with light it would quickly break down again. So, they had to dilute the nitric acid with the concentrated sulfuric acid, only then could it be heated. The concentrated sulfuric acid would absorb water, while the nitric acid would evaporate.

Regarding the problem with the light, the nitric acid had to be stored in a brown glass bottle. To make all of this possible, His Royal Highness had already specially prepared a thermometer for him.

When Kyle saw it for the first time, he thought that it was very intricate. It was a hollow glass pipe filled with mercury, both ends of the tube were sealed so that they didn't have to worry about any mercury leakage while using it. Around the tube there were several lines drawn one above the other. When the temperature rose or fell, the mercury would follow, until it reached a constant position and the temperature could then be read.

Today, the laboratory had produced three bottles of concentrated sulfuric acid and a bottle of concentrated nitric acid. At this concentration, he found that sulfuric acid wasn't flowing as smooth as water anymore. Rather, it was flowing like a sticky oil. And the nitric acid was no longer colorless and transparent with its high concentration, it had now turned into a light yellow liquid, and when the glass cap was opened, it would emit bursts of white smoke.

“Head Instructor, will we have to produce these two acids every day?” One of his disciples, a man named Amon asked.

“We have to do it until His Highness gives us a new task.” For a moment, Kyle paused, “Why, are you worried that you won't have any time to discover your own alchemic formula?”

Amon nodded.

Seeing him so earnest, Kyle had to laugh, “I forgot to tell you that later the title of Alchemist Instructor will soon become unnecessary, so you don’t have to search for a new formula to become an alchemist.”

“No...” Amon was totally stunned, “Don’t need it?” The other disciplines had overheard his words and were now slowing down with the work at hand, and instead closely following along with their teacher’s words.

“That’s right, the future alchemist doesn’t have to fumble with new formulas, instead they will need to have good memory and the ability of deduction,” Kyle clapped with his hands, which was the sign for the others to gather to his side.

“His Highness has given me a book titled, “Primary Chemistry”. This is also the reason why I’ve come to Border Town, if you thoroughly study through it, most of the world’s formulas, can be inferred by using the book’s contents.

“Can be inferred?” The disciples issued weak shouts.

“Yes, After I have read through it in detail, I will start to teach it to you,” Kyle announced, “as for the way of promotion, His Highness has already explained this to me. In the future, you will have to pass a test that he had personally prepared to get the title of Chemist. Believe me, it won’t take long before the honorary title of Chemist will be considered of a much higher rank than that of

an Alchemist. And using the knowledge you have learned, even the Alchemist of the King's City's Alchemy Workshop wouldn't be able to catch up to you. ”

Chapter 165 - Chase

Lightning traveled back and forth between Border Town and the southern hills, while the parchments in her hands were slowly becoming all the more complete.

This was her newly received task, together with Soraya, she had to draw a map of the Western Border.

Flying together with Soraya, her flying height was significantly reduced, making it awfully difficult to fly over the forest. So she would first paint a rough outline of the topography, and later with Soraya, they would draw a more exact picture. By using her magic pen, the map would look like a view from up in the air, every detail seemingly totally lifelike.

After a parchment was filled, Lightning would then turn around, and fly back to Border Town. Today, after a few months of training, her flying speed had only become faster and faster. According to the calculation method taught by Prince Roland, her full-speed flight had almost reached close to one hundred and twenty kilometers per hour. At this speed, the incoming strong wind made it nearly impossible for her to open her eyes.

Because of this problem, Lightning thought that she had already reached her limit, but the day before yesterday, His Royal Highness had given her a gift. A headband made out of leather, with two copper ring wrapped into it. Embedded inside those copper rings was a pure and transparent glass, allowing her, for as long as she wore the headband, to be immune to the incoming wind.

His Royal Highness had said that this headband is called ‘windproof glasses’, and that it was actually quite easy to manufacture, by melting some glassware. He had also said, that with her wearing the headband she would look even more like a small Ezreal.

Lightning didn’t know who this Ezreal person was, but she realized that even though the headband was only made out of cowhide, copper rings, and glass lenses, it had still needed a lot of effort to put something like this together. The complete piece of leather had a double layered structure to it so that it could wrap itself tightly around the inset copper rings. And also, to keep her from worrying that the leather band would scratch her skin, the headband had something similar to the buckle of a belt on it, with which she could adjust its size. Looking at it, it didn’t give her the impression of something that had been just casually made.

She immediately fell in love with this gift, almost to the extent that she wanted to wear it even when she was sleeping. Now, she only had to had to pull down the glasses, and she could keep on flying faster and faster, no longer needing to take into account the impact from the whistling wind.

It wouldn’t take very long before Lighting would reach the town, she had planned to immediately head back to the castle and hand over the new map to Soraya, but at that very moment a pale figure suddenly swept past the corner of her eye.

Looking sideways, Lightning saw a pigeon with its wings extended gliding in the direction of Longsong Stronghold. Pigeons

weren't very rare birds, but this one was quite different, it was really too big to be like normal pigeon, just the wings alone would be enough to satisfy her stomach for the length of a whole day.

Lightning had to swallow down her saliva, she remembered the time when she had still lived on the island and caught some flying fish by hand later roasting them over the fire.

Now, living under the roof of His Highness, although the food was very rich, having to eat bread with butter and mushroom soup for months on end, the food had started to become somewhat tasteless to her, so if she could catch a pigeon for roasting...

Reaching out to the pack of salt and pepper fastened to her waist, her decision was made.

Turning around, Lightning flew straight toward the pigeon, and the pigeon quickly noticed the approach of the uninvited guest. It immediately folded its wings, diving downward and seemingly wanting to drill into the woods, to rid itself of this menacing hunter.

Seeing this scene unfolding in front of her, Lighting was shocked, she would never have thought a pigeon could be this smart. A few seconds later, a broad grin spread across her face, and with a sudden turn, she followed the pigeon as it dove downwards. Since the Months of Demons had already ended, the little girl had become confident that nothing could escape from beneath her gaze.

For a moment, the pigeon still skimmed over the treetops, but a moment later it lowered its altitude even further, entering the forest and flying extremely close to the ground. But the distance between itself and its hunter only became shorter and shorter, no matter how fast it beat its wings, it couldn't throw off Lightning's pursuit.

The dense forest receded, and the sun would occasionally shine through the branches, becoming alternating patches of light and shade. Until they finally flew through an open area, and their surroundings suddenly became open and bright. Grabbing hold of this opportunity, Lightning brought her speed up to maximum, instantly hugging the pigeon from behind and tumbling to the ground.

The pigeon struggled heavily, trying to break free from its shackles. Lightning had already pulled out the knife from her waist, ready to finish off the game, but at this last moment, the dove opened its beak, "Don't, goo! Help me, goo!"

The little girl's shock was so heavy, that she almost tossed her knife away. But she quickly regained her rationality, and asked, "You, are you a witch?"

As an answer, the pigeon nodded.

"And I thought I could finally taste another type of flavor," Lightning sighed in regret, putting her knife away. "My name is Lightning, what is your name?"

The other expanded into a ball, and then turned into its human form, “Maggie, you actually wanted to eat a bird!” the woman complained.

“I have already eaten a lot of them from before.” Lightning just shrugged her shoulder in response instead. She reached out her hand to pull Maggie up. All of a sudden, a bead rolled out from within Maggie’s bosom, bouncing on to the ground twice, only to fall into a small pit. When Lightning quickly went over to pick up the bead, wanting to hand it back to Maggie, but found that the glass-like red bead with some strange letters engraved on it, seeming very familiar to her.

After frowning for a moment, she grasped a string around her neck, and slowly pulled a dark red pendant from her chest. Placing both of it into her hands to compare them, she discovered that the pattern on them was exactly the same.

“What?” Shocking Maggie who was looking over her shoulder from the back. “Why do you have a trace?”

“A trace ... What’s that?”

“You don’t know what it is? This thing can respond to a magic stone, allowing the holder of the stone to locate your position.” Maggie suddenly stopped, “No, why should I even tell this to you? Just now, you wanted to eat me!”

“Do you have such a magic stone?”

“There are,” Maggie nodded her head.

“So, can you find my position?” Lightning asked curiously.

“No, it must match the magic stone to be able to locate the corresponding mark.” She replied very agilely this time, “and only us witches can use this. If you don’t know this already, how were you even able to get one?”

“It was my dad who gave it to me,” Lightning returned the bead to Maggie. “What about you?

“I won’t tell you,” Maggie answered grudgingly, but then she stared curiously at the other girl. “You belong to the Witch Cooperation Association, and Ashes said, that you do not want to leave Border Town.”

“You belong to her side?” Lightning curled up her lips in disdain, “And I thought you were a new witch who was attracted by the rumor. Us witches here have a good life, why should we leave?”

“Because of the danger ah, the church may come here at any time, bringing their Army over with them.”

“An explorer will never shrink away from something because it is too dangerous,” When Lightning spoke out aloud, her face turned slightly red, well... the Stone Tower doesn’t count. It is only a matter of time before I visit the ruin again, and by then I must be the first to enter the basement.

“Furthermore, His Highness Roland Wimbledon has a lot of incredible invention, as long as you have seen them once, you will immediately become attracted to them. One can turn a fist-sized ball into a weapon, and when someone is hit by it, they are torn into pieces.”

“Really? Can you take me to see them?” Maggy exclaimed in admiration.

“That won’t do, unless you join the Witch Alliance, and become one of us.”

“But I have to go back with Ashes...” Maggie hesitated.

“Then you can come back later, ah,” Lightning continued her coaxing. “Here you can have a lot of fun. We have machines which move on their own using heated water, there are also weapons which are able to attack over a distance of a thousand meter, uh... are you asking yourself how far a thousand meters is? All in all, it is very far, if you look at people from one kilometer away, they will seem to be about the size of a tree branch.”

Making many gestures with her hands and feet, “and there are even many more possibilities to go play within the Concealing Forest. Things like poking honeycombs, gathering so many mushrooms that you couldn’t even count all of it, and hunting birds and the wild boars are all so very interesting. Peeling off their fur and roasting them over the campfire. You only have to sprinkle a little salt and pepper on them, and you can relish and eat as much

tasty meat as you would ever want.”

“Really?” Maggie couldn’t help but start licking her lips.

“Why should I lie to you,” Lightning hooked her arm around Maggie’s shoulder, “On the other hand, we might even go hunt a bird and roast it, right now!”

Chapter 166 - On The Eve Of The Decisive Battle

On the fifth day after their agreement, Roland had finally readied all the raw material he needed for the production of the gun-cotton.

He had made some serious mistakes in the beginning with the electrolysis of the salt water, he wanted to take advantage of the leftover copper strips from Anna's bullet production and use them as electrodes, but the final result was that, the electrodes had dissolved in the water, giving birth to the possibility of forming chlorine during the electrolysis. With this, the whole basin of saltwater was wasted.

The electrolyte was generally saturated salt water, but the problem was that the salt in this era was not as cheap as the price of cabbage. Therefore, when the water was drained and Roland detected that the copper ions had mixed into the brine, turning it also into waste. Roland felt as if he was throwing away gold royals instead of just salt. In the end, he was able to solve this problem by replacing the electrodes with carbon.

By adding caustic soda to the boiling water to dislodge the oil, he obtained an absorbent cotton gauze. He then later brought over the leftover caustic soda back to the chemistry lab.

The esterification of the gun-cotton was the most important step in the production process, but he didn't exactly know how he could achieve this. Roland only knew that he would have to soak the gauze in the mixed acid and when the nitrification process was

complete, he could then take it out.

Whether it was the solution ratio or the duration of the reaction, he didn't know anything about this. So with this in mind, Roland ordered Kyle to form groups and run some experiments. Using hourglasses to observe the time, the pieces of cotton gauze were repeatedly dipped into the mixed acid and rinsed with water. At the last step, they were soaked in a sodium hydroxide solution to remove the excess liquid acid. Afterward, the still wet products were then shipped back to the castle, where they got air-dried by Wendy.

The result was that the best esterification process would be achieved by using the highly concentrated fuming acid, and with it, most of the trial product could also be quickly ignited. In the end, to achieve the best effect with the gun-cotton would be to use the ratio of one part nitric acid and two parts sulfuric acid.

When the rough formula was finally calculated, the laboratory would then start with the mass production and immediately after the soaking and washing process was completed would it be brought away by the First Army. In the end, even the Chief Instructor did not know what exactly it was that they had actually produced.

The dry gauze was cut into tiny fingernail sized pieces by the maidservants and afterward were stored in separate boxes. They were then sent to the North Slope Mountain. There in the backyard they would complete the final loading phase.

In the absence of machines, the process could only be done by

using basic manpower. A bunch of guards would have to sit down, dip the gun-cotton in the adhesive and gently push it into the bottom of each cartridge, this way sealing the ignition hole. Then, they carefully pour in the gunpowder with a funnel, compacting it as far as possible and making sure that each cartridge received an equal share of the propellant.

The final step was to place the warhead on top of the cartridge. The warheads and cartridges were made by Anna who had to ensure that they would fit together so perfectly, that only a few gentle taps with a hammer were required to seal them.

The efficiency of production was very low, in one day they weren't even able to produce more than 100 bullets. Then on the sixth day, Carter could finally start using the new weapon. Since the Chief Knights body fulfilled every qualification that was required to be an excellent marksman, his hit rate had been greatly improved after repeated practice over the last few days. Compared to the performance he had shown right after Roland introduced the weapon to him, it was like the difference between heaven and earth.

After fixing the problems with the ammunition, Carter no longer had to use his previous strange shooting posture, with him always having to point the gun downwards. Now, as long as the sealing collodion didn't break, the gun chamber could easily be kept clean. And since it was several times more flammable than the black powder, the fast firing rate was also guaranteed.

Taking advantage of the last day of time they had left, Roland allowed Carter to train his rapid gun drawing and even dual-pistol

shooting skills. The recoil of the 12mm pistols was so strong, that it quickly became difficult to guarantee that the second shot would score while holding the gun only with one hand. But in Roland's plan, Carter would first hold back, letting Ashes draw in close and then start with his surprise attack.

Taking into account that Carter would carry two guns during the duel, if the fight ever turned to close combat, with ten bullets his success should be guaranteed. If the opponent closed in too quickly, Carter could quickly pull out his second gun. And taking into account that Ashes' weapon offered a certain degree of defense, Roland deliberately chose the not easily deformed steel bullets, increasing its penetration ability instead of using bullets with a high lethality.

With the limits of the current era's smelting technology, Ashes great sword was in all likelihood made out of pig iron to exaggerate its form without bringing any actual quality improvements. On the contrary, such bulky iron weapons were not actually fully forged, which lead to the problem that the internal stress distribution would become uneven, and with this, it couldn't be called a good shield. From Roland's point of view, her weapon could be classified at best, to be of common quality. So as long as their luck wasn't awful tomorrow, the possibility of being hit by ricocheting bullets was very low.

If Ashes wanted to beat Carter, she would first have to close the distance, which was a cold weapons inherent disadvantage against hot weapons. As long as her eyesight wasn't exaggerated to such a large degree that she could even track the ballistic curves, allowing her to instantly dodge the bullets, the starting distance should actually be an insurmountable gap.

Maggie flew back to Ashes room only after the sky had already started to turn dark.

“Why are you coming back so late these past few days?” Ashes asked after closing the window.

“Lightning took me with her to catch some birds,” When Maggie had changed back to her human form, she took a roasted bird leg out of her pocket, immediately filling the room with an overflowing aroma, “I deliberately left a piece for you.”

“I’ve eaten,” Ashes shook her head. “Is Lightning one of the witches in the Witch Cooperation Association?”

“Gooo,” Maggie nodded frantically, “her ability is similar to mine, like me, she can also soar in the skies, but her ability is much more easier to use than mine.” After pausing for a moment, she then asked, “Sister Ashes, do you insist on beating them? I feel... that they aren’t actually ever going to go with you, and they live here quite well. “

Ashes was startled by this unexpected question and didn’t answer.

“Because, even I want to stay here now, goo,” Maggie sat down on the bed and self-servingly said, “The bed is soft, and the food we get is also sumptuous. I noted that when it was time for lunch, the

Lord specifically placed the table in the backyard so that he could dine together with the witches after their practice. Everyone was talking and laughing, and he occasionally also gives a few words, he looks completely different than those aristocrats that hate us. This afternoon Lightning had taken me with her to play Gwent, it is a game playable for two and they even gave me two decks. Ashes sister, do you want to play together with me? I will teach you.”

“No...” Ashes shook her head and took a deep breath. She was aware of the changes in Maggie’s behaviour taking place during the last few days, but she only realized just now, that her own beliefs had also been quite befuddled.

These days, the majority of the witches are living in fear, living without any purpose, and their only pursuit was to live a comfortable and stable life. The same could be said about Maggie before she had been accepted by Tilly. She had lived within the reeds of a thatched house in the slums of King’s City, just like a real bird, she had spent her nights within the slits of the roof beams. Even after Tilly had decided to cross the seas eastwards, Maggie was still running around, contacting those other witches living in hiding, without even stopping once in the last six months. Most probably she was experiencing a life of peace and quiet for the first time ever.

Wasn’t it exactly the same for me? After I have met Tilly, I suddenly lived a life I had never dared to dream of. But now, after being accustomed to a relatively quiet life in the palace, I ignored the attraction of what it meant to finally call a place my home again, in the eyes of those others witches, this is something they have never had before. It is only logical that they want to keep on staying here, wanting to protect their territory and all the feelings

it contains, for me it is probably also the reason that I want to protect Tilly in the first place...

If Roland Wimbledon really does what he has said he would, with him being able to resist the God's Punishment Army, there is no doubt that living in Border Town will be a better choice than traveling to the Fjords and establishing a Kingdom of Witches in that strange land. It seems to be just the place that our hearts are yearning for, but in the end, how much they will have to suffer no one can really predict.

However, if he is unable to resist the church, will the other witches leave?

Ashes mood suddenly cooled down.

Changing the perspective of her thoughts, if Tilly is unable to gain a foothold in the Fjords, I am afraid I will choose to stand beside her, guarding her until the last moment. As the person who I decided to be leading me towards my destiny, I won't leave her before reaching it.

"Living here you will always be under the threat of the Church, and if they are unable to stop the God's Punishment Army, it is only a matter of time before Border Town will be destroyed."

Indeed, the test was no longer necessary... but Ashes still decided to go through with it. In order to wake them up and prove her point.

“And if they can stop them?” Maggie muttered.

“I hope so too, so I will help them to verify this point.” Ashes voice became gradually smaller.

Finally closing her eyes, she was now ready to go all out.

Chapter 167 - Victory

They chose to hold the competition at the foot of the western City wall.

As for the spectators, in addition to Roland, there were also Iron Axe, Sir Pine, Brian and all the members of the Witch Alliance.

Plus, a fat pigeon who was squatting on the floor and looking upwards.

In order to avoid an incident where other people were accidentally hit by bullets, everyone who wanted to follow the test had to board and sit on the wall. Furthermore, the two fighters, the Chief Knight Carter Landis and the extraordinary witch Ashes would both be fighting close to the wall.

Carter's attire was no longer like the heavy knight armor he wore in the past, rather, he now wore leather clothes which were easy to move in. He even had a custom-made holsters at his waist, giving him the opportunity to insert a revolver on both the left and right sides separately.

In addition, there was also a knife, fitted horizontal on his back, which could be used in case of an emergency. But Roland knew, if Carter had to fall back to using the knife during the fight with an extraordinary, it would be better to just throw in the towel.

Ashes was still wearing the same dress as usual, a black robe covered her whole body while her black hair was tied into a

ponytail, which was falling naturally down behind her. Seemingly completely ignoring that this would create an extra weakness for herself. The only difference with now was, that the clothes wrapped around her great sword had been uncovered, showing her dark brown blade, which reflected almost no light.

It was exactly like Roland had expected, the sword surface was totally uneven, completely unlike a well-forged weapon's. And because of the lack of maintenance she had provided to her weapon, the weapon had already begun to rust at the places where pieces had been cut out of it.

When the two stepped on to the stage, Carter constantly adjusted their position, until they had a distance of around 15 meters between each other. At this distance, during his training he would have a more than 80% firing accuracy. Taking the two pistols out of his holsters, Carter checked for the last time whether there were any issues with the bullets or the barrel.

Roland had Echo mimic and amplify his voice, “The rules of the duel are very simple:

-You are not allowed to move before the starting signal!

-You can always throw in the towel!

- As long as one of you do not receive an instant-kill, Nana's healing ability will be able to soon restore you to your original state!

Are there any questions left?"

After waiting for a moment and seeing that neither of them had anything to say, Roland went on and said, "When the bell rings, the duel will begin!"

Ashes silently sized up her opponent. As an extraordinary, most of the time, she just listened to her instincts when fighting. Furthermore, Tilly had also made it possible for her to take lessons from the best fencing masters in the palace, but she had always felt that these skills had only helped her in a minimal way.

Her opponent this time was the Prince's Chief Knight, but contrary to his rank, he didn't bear the common sword and shield, or spear equipment, he wasn't even dressed in his usual armor. The weapons in his hands looked very strange, but according to its shape, it obviously couldn't be regarded as a dagger or any other weapon related to the close fighting category. That meant that there was only one possibility left, it had to be similar to hand crossbows, which was a long-range striking weapon.

Against an extraordinary, crossbows were no threat at all, at least this was what she had learned on her own during a lot of fights. As long as it was a hand crossbow, she could even catch the flying arrows empty-handed. But when she looked at the Prince's confident expression, she knew that the weapons in her opponent's hands were more than likely not as simple as an ordinary crossbow.

Her instincts told her, that she should close in to the knight as soon as possible, rather than waiting for the other side to release

his external attack. Because of this plan, before the duel even started, Ashes thrust her sword into the ground, taking a pose that gave off no threat, but this was actually the most effective way for her to deal with an opponent using a crossbow.

At this moment, the crisp sound of a bell ringing could be heard coming from the direction of the wall.

Almost at the same time, Ashes firmly grasped the sword handle, putting all of her power into moving it forward. Throwing soil, grass, and even gravel into the sky with the wide side of her blade, letting it splash in the direction of the knight and forming a wall of sand between them.

The Chief Knight's reaction was also very fast, releasing a burst of flame from the arms in his hands, accompanied by a huge roar. But Ashes didn't see any arrows flying out of them, which means that he had either forgotten to install them or that they were coming too fast for her to see. Compared with the first option that would be considered an idiot mistake, Ashes thought that the latter option was much more likely.

Under the cover of the sand screen, Ashes started her sprint. Within the blink of an eye, the distance between the two of them was narrowed to half while the sand screen had still not yet completely landed on the ground. Most people would subconsciously try to avoid being covered by the flying dirt, so as long as she could interrupt the other side from continuing to shoot, Ashes has most likely already won.

But Carter did not move from his position, he completely

disregarded the sand hitting his face, squinting his eyes together while constantly following the movement of the extraordinary with his weapons, once again pulling the triggers of his weapons and sending out another burst of flames and a roar. On a conditional reflex Ashes stepped to the side, but until now she had still not seen any arrows or any other projectiles coming at her, while the knight also didn't show any movement of pulling any strings or having to prepare the next arrow.

This new weapon could probably be launched continuously, but since the first two consecutive shot have missed, the outcome has already been decided!

Closing the last ten steps in the blink of an eye, she had already appeared in front of the knight, holding her sword vertical, pressing her feet against the ground preparing to directly smash into the knight. Normally being hit by such an impact, her opponent would not die instantly, but it should still be enough to cause him to faint. Even if he were able to hold on with his strong battle will, the crushed bones in his chest would still make him completely lose the ability to fight.

In last breath before the moment of impact, Ashes could hear, for the third time, the bursting sound coming from the other side. Then a moment later, she felt as her sword was hit, followed by a crisp breaking sound and her right abdomen then suddenly becoming numb, it felt as if it had been severely grabbed by someone.

Almost at the same time, her whole body smashed into Carter's chest, directly sending him into the air, making him draw an arc

and then sliding over the ground.

Until now, she had such a strong battle-will that she was able to totally disregard her waist injury. But just then, as if she had gotten a hit to her head, a strong sense of dizziness suddenly came over her mind. She staggered two steps forward, nearly falling to the ground as if her extraordinary magic had directly poured out of her body like water from a broken flask, causing her limbs to become unbearable heavy.

Ashes had to use her sword to hold up her body, and the previous numb wound then started to turn into a searing pain, it felt as if a part of her waist was now missing. Looking down she could even see her own viscera spilling out. Biting her tongue, she kept herself from falling.

...

In Roland's eyes, the whole process of the duel didn't last much longer than four or five seconds. He saw how the extraordinary witch threw dirt towards Carter, while he started to launch his own assault. During the middle, Ashes once changed her direction but by then she had already severely collided with the Knight's body. But within this short moment of time, Carter was still able to shot three rounds of bullets, which was beyond what Roland had thought would be possible.

Having to face the unusually fast approaching Ashes, I'm afraid even if I only had to follow the opponents movements closely, it would already have been awfully difficult for me to achieve, but he could not only follow her and aim but he was even able to shoot at

her three times, fully proving that the title of Chief Knight wasn't for show. The fact that the first two rounds had missed was totally normal, in fact, if Ashes had continued to use her speed and changed her direction, I'm afraid Carter shots would have never hit her.

The key part was in the third round, in the final five or six meters. During that part, Ashes was holding her great sword in front of her chest as a shield and had gone in a straight line for the impact.

If it was a crossbow or even heavy crossbow, even if they hit against her sword, they wouldn't have caused any impact to an extraordinary. But the 12mm caliber ammunition together with the steel warheads at that distance would show an unparalleled power.

Roland then saw black fragments splattering into the air, soon followed by blood and gore. When Ashes finally stood firmly again, the Prince discovered that a large part of her waist was now gone, giving the impression as if there was a beast that had chewed out a large chunk of meat out of her. Her guts had also fallen out of her wound, and were hanging down the side of her body.

Looking at her sword he saw that the lower part of the great sword now had a bowl-shaped gap in it. Probably caused by when the bullet had gone through her sword, the unstable warhead and the broken-out pieces of her sword had hit into her waist, causing her such an immense wound.

Even while seriously injured, she had still not fainted. Only by

purely relying on her extraordinary power could she still stand upright on the battlefield, showing off her terrible physical power. If it were the lead balls from before or only the bullet, I am afraid she could have just ignored them. Maggie was the first one who arrived at Ashes side. With a face full of anxiety, she tried to hold her friend up, but unfortunately, her figure was so short, that she could only grab Ashes around her legs.

Nana was also already rushing in the direction of Carter to treat him, while Roland instead quickly moved in front of Ashes.

Seeing him appear, it seems she had only waited for this moment.

“I won...” Finishing what she wanted to say, she didn’t even wait for Roland’s reaction, she instead fell straight against his shoulders.

Chapter 168 - Recall

“Scram! Dirty beggar!”

Someone pushed hard against her, but she did not move a bit. Instead, it was the assailter who was the one to stagger two steps back.

The man's arrogant expression disappeared from his face and instead instantly turned into one of shock. A moment later he abruptly turned around and left with his tail between his legs.

During this whole time, she remained unaffected and kept on moving through the crowd. When they saw the worn-out woman, most of the people stepped out of her way while frowning. In this way, she was able to slowly move further in the direction of Graycastle's inner city gate.

Although there were traditionally no walls separating the inner city, the people had erected a symbolic gate made out of wood and garlands to better control the sea of people.

On both sides of the gate stood two neatly arranged rows of armor-wearing warriors, all of whom had an exquisite armor that was dazzlingly reflecting the shimmering sunlight. With their spread-out eagle wings on their shoulders it gave off the impression that they desired to fly off into the sky. The iris flower decoration hanging over their chests together with their heroic and handsome faces had gathered their own group of rich housewives that were shouting and quarreling over them.

The warriors were all wearing red capes that fell down to the ground. They seemed to be a red wall if you were to look at them from behind. It was these handsome and mighty warriors who were responsible for dividing the crowd, forming a wide and vacant road which was only usable by the more influential families.

Many banners were flying in the wind alongside the road, and a lot of the strip-shaped golden-colored flags were hanging from the flagpoles, giving off a quite, solemn and respectful presence. The banners were embroidered with many different designs, but most of them were covered by the tower and the pike. She knew that this pattern represented the Royal Family of the Kingdom of Graycastle, who was also the organizer of today's ceremony.

Today, they held the royal ceremony to celebrate the day of adulthood of the 5th Princess, Tilly Wimbledon.

Since it was made public one week ago, this matter had already created a great public buzz, so much that everyone in the city already knew about it. In addition to the local aristocracy of the Kingdom of Graycastle, the envoys from the other kingdoms had also come. They were all carrying plenty of gifts and marriage proposals in the hope of earning the favor of 5th Princess.

Even the Church had sent an Archbishop to preside over the ceremony. The ceremony would be held at the city center of the Square of Dawn. At that time, the royal family would start to give away meat porridge and thick soup, which was also the reason why the event had attracted so many people.

However, she hadn't come for the food.

Her goal was the Archbishop.

If she was able to kill an Archbishop under the watchful eyes of the King. It would make it impossible for the Church to cover up the incident, ending up in a great loss of face for them. Tasting such a sweet flavor of revenge made her feel endlessly excited. Touching her chest, she reassured herself that the snatched knife was still there. Although the knife was of poor quality, it would be enough to kill a mortal.

At this moment, the crowd suddenly released a burst of overwhelming cheers, interrupting her from her thoughts. Looking in the direction of the Inner City, she discovered that the rows of the Knights from the Kingdom of Graycastle had begun to slowly march forward. The Knight in the front was dressed in the shiniest armor, like a flickering flame his gold-embroidered red cloak fluttered behind him as he walked.

The Knights were followed by a carriage which was being dragged by four fine horses that moved side by side. The Royal Family's emblem was carved into the wall of the carriage and its wheels and frames were plated in gold. On the roof of the carriage there floated a scarlet burgee, while a gold-embroidered silken fabric was hanging over each corner of the carriage. At first glance, the whole carriage looked like a flowing golden ocean.

Mixing herself in with the crowd of people who were following

along the carriage, she was also able to set foot on the Plaza of Dawn. The inner area of the plaza was isolated by a row of guards, only allowing the aristocracy to get a close look at the ceremony taking place. She estimated that she would have to stop here for now. But, as soon as the Archbishop stepped into the plaza, she would immediately dart over, needing only a few breaths of time to reach him, leaving it impossible for him to escape from her grasp.

One young person after another jumped out of the royal carriage and slowly moved onto the central stage. They were most probably Wimbledon III's five children.

Within these people, she also detected the 5th Princess Tilly Wimbledon.

There was no doubt that the 5th Princess was the protagonist of the day. Her eyes were full of intelligence and clear like two gems; her light makeup together with her long braided gray hair gave her a refreshing and simple impression; standing within that group of brothers and sisters she looked outstanding; the pattern embroidered on her dress wasn't complicated at all, and it was perfectly matched together with her temperament. But what was most incredible was that she had actually looked all over the rows of people, even directly into her eyes, smiling and nodding slightly, as if the Princess was greeting her personally.

This definitely hadn't been an illusion. In that short moment, an incomparable feeling of closeness was born inside of her, like they were friends who had known each other for years, warm and sweet. It wasn't born from any blood relation or by being of similar

social status, but rather it came from... the resonance of their magic.

She unconsciously released the strong grip on the handle of her knife, and instead began to quietly watch as the woman that was walking on the stage. Not long after the ceremony, she was found by two guards who had been tasked with escorting her to the palace.

As long as she herself didn't want to follow them, the guards would have never been able to stop her. But she did not ask anything from them, she just simply began to follow the two further into the inner city, until they finally reached the magnificent palace that stood at the end of the road.

Within a secret room of the palace, she met with the 5th Princess for the first time.

“...So it was like this.”

“It’s an unfortunate story, and afterward you’ve eventually come to live within the Kingdom of Graycastle.”

“Do not worry. In the future, you will not have to wander around any longer. From now on you’ll be staying with me.”

“I will give you a good makeup and make sure that they will not be able to recognize your face.”

“I have heard that the monastery was destroyed by a fire and that all the children have gone missing. Only ruins and ashes are left of the buildings.”

“Do you have a name from before that time?”

“In that case, from now on your name will be Ashes.”

...

When Ashes opened her eyes, the first thing that caught her eye was Maggie’s face.

The other side blinked a few times and then she came up and embraced Ashes, “You finally woke up goo!”

Ashes tried to move her lower fingers, only to discover that she wasn’t hit by the weakness or numbness that she had expected. Furthermore, she also felt that there was no pain coming from her waist.

“How long have I been asleep?”

“One afternoon,” Maggie said, “Nana said that your medical treatment was already completed and you could wake up at anytime. But when you wake up your body will feel very tired and you will first have to rest for a while. However, when you wake up for the second time you should feel much better and all of your energy should already have recovered.”

Ashes began to pat Maggie's head and slowly sat up on the bed and opened her clothes to examine herself. Only to discover that her abdomen was now completely intact. The huge wound was gone as if it only had been a nightmare, and now after she had woken up, it had disappeared into nothingness.

"She is ... how did she heal me?"

"I think that you would prefer not to know about it," Maggie begun, but when she saw the determination in Ashes' eyes she decided to continue, "They put the scattered... goo, parts of your body back into their places, and then filled the stomach wound back up. When everything was back in its place, Nana began to release her magic, restoring your stomach back to its original state. The more parts they collected, the faster she could heal you, and if something was completely absent, she would be able to grow it back again."

Ashes felt goosebumps all over her body, "All of the dirt and grass my body parts was stained with, were they also..."

"When Nana was healing you, all the dirt was discharged out of your body. It seems that her ability can distinguish between what is useful and what is harmful."

Hearing this, she felt relieved and tried to stand up from her bed, testing how much power her body had recovered by now. The result was that it was completely opposite to what Nana had previously said. After waking up, she couldn't feel any traces of

weakness from her body. Instead, it felt as if she now possessed even more power than she'd had in the past.

After putting on her black robe, Ashes took a look at the sky outside of the window and then started walking toward the door.

“Where are you going?” Maggie asked, confused.

“I’m going to see His Royal Highness,” Ashes answered without looking back.

Chapter 169 - Farewell

Entering his office, she met once again with Roland Wimbledon. At this moment, he was still busy writing, probably dealing with government affairs. The sun was already going down behind the western mountains, infecting the sky with a touch of gold. The last of the sun's light was still shining through the windows, throwing long shadows across the table.

Waiting until the Prince put down his quill, Ashes declared: "I won."

"Indeed, you won." The other simply acknowledge it with a nod.

That Roland would yield in such a frank and straightforward manner, came to her unexpectedly. She had thought that he would still try to quibble about it, never believing that he would recognize the result so easily.

"But I admit that you have the power to fight against the God's Punishment Army," Ashes continued, "The God's Punishment Army isn't impervious to sword and spear, their body strength is similar to mine, but they have lost their consciousness and ability to think. Which is also the reason why I can simultaneously cope with three of them at once.

"If during the previous test the Knight's opponent had been a member of the God's Punishment Army, I think that they would have just simply rushed forward. Because of this, the God's Punishment Army cannot be sent out like the Army of Judges can.

If my guess isn't wrong, the Church has to always send someone who will lead them during the fight."

"Thank you," Roland smiled. "This information is very important."

"What was the new weapon your knight was using?"

"A firearm," Roland explained, "In the future, all of my soldiers will be equipped with this kind of weapon. Even an untrained farmer, as long as they have a gun, will be able to defeat even a well-trained Judge."

For a moment, Ashes hesitated but then she still asked, "Can you give one of those firearms to me?"

"Unless you join the Witch Alliance that will be impossible," Roland said determined, "after all, at present, this weapon is still very rare."

Having already expected his refusal, she slowly exhaled. "I have to meet up with Tilly as soon as possible, so early tomorrow morning I will be leaving Border Town. If you aren't able to push the church back, you can always move to the Fjord, asking for asylum."

Roland nodded, "You too, do not forget to tell my dear sister the news, that at the western border of the Kingdom of Graycastle there is a place which shelters witches.

“...” For a moment Ashes fell silent, “I will consider it.”

As she prepared to leave the office, the Prince stopped her unexpectedly, “Wait, I have a gift for you. It is behind the door.”

A gift?

She stared blankly into the air, but when she came back to herself she turned around and saw that there was a huge sword placed beside the door and because it had been previously blocked by the open door she hadn’t noticed it when she had entered the office.

“Your sword cannot be used any longer, so I let Anna create a new one for you. This sword, however, isn’t made out of poor quality pig iron, no, this is made out of pure steel.”

Indeed, its whole body surface was evenly smoothed, in the light of the sunset, it held an orange-red metallic luster. Stepping forward, she gently stroked the sword, discovering that the blade’s thickness was very uniform. Showing traces that it had gone through a tempering process, there was no doubt that this was a weapon of excellent quality. The only thing which still puzzled Ashes, was its strange shape. Compared with the usual double-edged sword blade system, it only had one blade, while the other edge was about as wide as her little finger. Furthermore, it didn’t possess a tip, instead it end was trapezoidal.

But the most peculiar part of the sword was that within the first

quarter of the sword, strange runes had been carved into it. In addition, there was also a half-moon painted at the blunt edge of the sword. The moon was painted in gold, and was thus very eye-catching.

Although she didn't want show how much she loved it, she still could not stop herself from impulsively reaching out and picking it up.

“Why does it looks so strange...?”

“Because it's not a normal weapon,” Roland laughed, “it's called 'Ashbringer', and it's of the legendary rank compared to your previous greatsword of the white rank.”

“...” Ashes decided that she didn't really need to know what those inexplicable words which had come out of his mouth were supposed to mean, “In that case, I will accept the gift from you and in return, I will also give you something back.”

“Oh? What would that it be?” The Prince's curiosity was picked.

But Ashes however, didn't answer, instead, she straight went out of the room.

On next morning, when Roland opened the door to his office, he once more saw Nightingale sitting at his desk and nibbling on a dry fish.

“They’re gone.”

“Have both of them left?”

“Yes,” Nightingale answered lazily, “They left the moment it was bright enough for them to see the road, Wendy was also there to send them off on their journey.”

Roland couldn’t stop himself from being deeply moved, after all, Wendy was concerned for every sister, not to mention the witches who had helped her escape from the monastery. Because of this, he had thought Wendy would follow Ashes when she left, never imagining that she would be the first to refuse the other party’s invitation.

With this, the Witch Alliance still had all twelve of their members, which left Roland with the feeling as if his whole body was filled with energy.

“Do you think they’re going to spread the news about another safe haven to the other witches on the other side of the sea?”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Nightingale said ominously while leaning back in his chair. “But when they meet a problem they cannot solve themselves, they will definitely think of Border Town.”

Closing his eyes, Roland went through the memories of the former 4th Prince in his mind.

Tilly and he had never been very close, or it could be better said that she had always maintained a certain distance from everyone, even her father, Wimbledon III was no exception to this. In addition to her good looks, she had also shown an outstanding sense of wisdom through her childhood, Roland's mind did not have any more information about her.

When had the 5th Princess started to secretly harbor witches, or when had she begun to develop her plans regarding the trip to the Fjords, Roland didn't know anything about this. But this also didn't matter as much, for now, she could be regarded as a natural ally in the fight against the Church. After all, with both of them resisting the Church they also shared a common goal for now.

As for dispatching Theo and letting him spread the news about the safe haven for witches, this also can't really be called a futile endeavour either. In the end, the awakening to a witch is still a random event, so it is impossible that Tilly will be able to take in all of the witches. Especially now after her organization is also busy withdrawing, the other new witches will be all the more urgent to find another shelter.

Now that I have gotten the news about the existence of the God's Punishment Army, the next task I will have at hand is to expand the production scales of those two acids.

More efficient gunpowders or explosives cannot be done without using nitric acid and sulfuric acid. When all the members of the First Army have replaced their old weapon with a runner rifle, by using the rifled barrel and also the new bullet there will be a large

improvement in the firing accuracy. Therefore, training was of utmost importance. In a time without fire curtains, an experienced veteran with exquisite shooting skills was worth ten rookies randomly spraying bullets around. But during this time the bullet consumption will also increase by a staggering amount.

Furthermore, there was still the problem of the black powder which remained in the barrel after firing a bullet, causing the rifle to clog and also reducing the barrel's expected lifetime. Only by using smokeless gun powder can this problem be solved.

In fact, earlier versions of smokeless gunpowder were in fact made out of nitrocellulose, while the later stages of it was made out of a mixture of nitrocellulose and something else. Currently, the sealing method of nitric acid soaked gun-cotton was quite inadequate, not to mention the amount of gun-cotton he would end up needing.

After all, the laboratory production will only be enough for small-scale production, if I want to meet the needs of a whole army, an industrial scale laboratory will also be needed. Unfortunately, the chemical industry is a complete stranger to me, so, for now, I'm unable to think of any usable solutions.

In addition, the education progress cannot be slowed down. It isn't just important to spread elementary cultural knowledge, no, the ideological transformation also has to be implemented as soon as possible. The original citizen of Border Town have already experienced the ordeal of the Months of Demons, with the propaganda spread by the First Army, they accept the witches to a much higher degree now, but within the outsiders coming in, the

indoctrination of the Church will still be present. And right now, the foreign population is busy rapidly rising, especially the serfs, they are all still living in their wooden sheds near the Redwater River, claiming it to be the town's "outer city". But once they are promoted to free people, they will gradually move into the city, and if I only then start to correct their beliefs it will already be too late.

So I have to come up with a method with which I can silently start to transform their beliefs, but also something which will be broadly accepted by them.

...

After being lost in thought for a long while, he opened his eyes, only to discover that Nightingale was busy observing him very closely. Their eyes met for a short moment, but then, she subconsciously turned her head away.

"Ah, yes, there was something I forgot to tell you," Nightingale began while looking out of the window, as if nothing had happened. "Wendy told me to pass something on to you."

"What was it?" Asked Roland.

"She said, 'Thank you.'"

Chapter 170 - The Gift Of Revenge (Part 1)

The sun slowly sank behind the mountains, allowing the night to descend over the Western Territory.

Not far from the road, the emissary group had discovered a piece of open land where they had decided to set up their tents.

Not a very long time later, a bonfire was burning in the center of their camp finally allowing the warriors to take off their armor and stretch out their tired bodies. Sitting leisurely around the fire, they waited for the porridge to start to boil.

Carrying a pot of hot water, Alicia stepped into one of the tents, “Priestess, I brought some hot water with me, please use this to wash your face.”

“Thank you.” Mira smiled and nodded in thanks, then dipped her towel into the water. “Tomorrow we will finally reach Border Town, we can then put an end to this exhausting journey.”

“The journey was nothing when compared to a fight against a demonic beast,” Alicia replied. “Contrary to what I had expected, it was your horsemanship that made me have a whole new level of respect for you. I had never thought that a Priestess would be so well accustomed to traveling.”

“Haha, that’s only normal. After all, I wasn’t born as a Priestess. Before my life in the Church I was a peddler, so riding quickly is a common thing for me.” Mira answered while she wiped her face

clean from the day's dust and sweat. When she was done, she handed the pot back to the warrioress, "Here, you should also wash your face. Maybe it will help you feel better?"

"What?" Alicia became startled by the Priestess' unexpected words.

"This is still about the matter of the God's Punishment Army, ah," the Priestess shook her head while still smiling, "your mood is clearly visible on your face and is still clearly affected by Abrams' words."

"..." Even though she took the pot, she didn't give her an answer.

"We, ah, during your lifetime you will encounter many difficulties and challenges, if you aren't able to get past these thresholds, not only the church, but the whole world suffer as a result. In order to hold back those terrible enemies, sometimes sacrifice is also necessary." Mira began to lecture, "It's a difficult choice, but never forget the church's motto."

"Choose the lesser of two evils" Alicia whispered.

Above all, joining the God's Punishment Army was entirely voluntary, and when Abrams's brother had decided to become a member of the God's Punishment Army, he was well informed about what this would mean for him. Being prepared to sacrifice oneself for the Church, this was one of the most noble of ideals, and for this sacrifice, his name would be forever engraved on the monument of glory, being spread together with the glory of the

Church.

“Thank you for your guidance,” Alicia said as she raised her right hand up to her heart “I feel much better now.”

What the Priestess had said was right, in order to spread its glory, they devoted all of their energy to God. Regardless of the outcome, the members of the God’s Punishment Army were at least following in their own beliefs. Coming to this conclusion, Alicia felt that a load had been lifted off from her chest.

“We should go out and get something to eat, until now they should have had enough time to get it done,” Mira laughingly said. “Really, we have eaten so much porridge lately, that our tongues can’t even taste its flavor anymore.”

“Fortunately, today will be the last day,” Alice couldn’t stop herself from starting to laugh, “Tomorrow we should be able to enjoy the Lord’s personal hospitality and also receive a sumptuous meal.”

After eating their tasteless dinner, the presiding judge elected to be tonight’s night watch, and the lucky warriors who weren’t elected immediately entered their tents, trying to get an early sleep. Alicia was no exception to this, together with the Priestess she also returned to their tent, putting out the lamp then covering themselves with their blankets.

She didn’t know for how long she had been sleeping, but within a dizzy moment, she suddenly heard a slightly muffled sound, it was

as if a big object had been thrown onto the ground. Not much later the sound could be heard again.

This time, she had heard something clashing against an armor, it wasn't obvious, but by no means was it just an illusion she might be having.

She abruptly opened her eyes wide.

Standing up, Alicia quickly grabbed her two-handed sword which laid beside her, slowly going to the side of the tent, preparing to sit in a corner and wait-and-see, but at this exact moment the roar of the presiding judge could be heard, "We're under attack!" With this roar, which instantly broke the quiet of the night, the camp immediately started to boil.

Then the sound of another loud clash could be heard!

And with it, the loud voice of the presiding judge also came to an abrupt end.

No longer hesitating, Alicia rolled out of the tent, seeing how the presiding judge's sword was split in half, no... it wasn't only his sword, even the Judge himself had been split in half, sending all of his blood into the sky. Within the shine of the campfire, Alicia could see his body powerlessly fall to his knees, slowly splitting into two and falling to the foot of a woman.

It looked like this woman who was holding a strange sword in

her hands, was the attacker. She had shrouded her body in a black robe and her face had also been covered by a hood. Within the shadows of her hood, the only thing Alicia could make out were her two sparkling golden eyes.

Two other Judges rushed forward in an attempt to stop this woman, but in front of her terrifying weapon, any thought of resistance was considered futile. The enemy was not only able to easily behead one warrior, she even split his sword into two as well. She could first hear the loud sound of two swords clashing, and then sparks and debris began to scatter everywhere, soon followed with the sound of a sword cutting into the flesh and then crushing bones. Hearing this cacophony of nightmare like sounds, her blood almost solidified.

“Witch!” Someone exclaimed.

The enemy was only one person... alone on her own, she dared to attack the camp of the Army of Judges, with the exception of the power of a fallen one, no one else would have been able to do this!

“Take the Priestess and flee” Alicia suddenly heard a steady voice coming from behind her.

Turning around she saw that the speaker was actually Abrams.

“You actually want me to flee and leave my companions behind?” Alicia couldn’t believe what she had just heard.

“Or else the death of the others will have been meaningless, it seems you simply don’t understand this!” Abrams growled, “The other side isn’t affected by our God’s Stone of Retaliation, and that is only the case if they are an extraordinary. So, I will try to stop her, while it is your task to bring the Priestess back in the direction of Longsong Stronghold! Remember to always use the road, so that in case you met a caravan you can immediately call for help!” Then grasping his sword he rushed towards the enemy.

An extraordinary, sucking in a mouthful of cold air, according to legends, only the members of the God’s Punishment Army are strong enough to fight against them. Everyone who encounters an extraordinary witch has to immediately seek help from the local church. Alicia knew that Abram was right, staying here would only turn their sacrifices into a vain act.

Seeing that they had already lost five members, the remaining Judges changed their strategy. They used the tents and the terrain to start a catching game, trying to win as much time as the possibly could. But Alicia knew that the strength and speed of the witch were much better than that of her companions, so it was only a matter of time before they all died.

Biting the bullet, she rushed into the tent, immediately grasping the Priestess who was still trying to get into her shoes and began to pull her in the direction of the horses.

“What happened?” Mira asked in confusion.

“The camp was attacked by an extraordinary! I must bring you away!” She shouted back, “Please hurry!”

However, with no possibility of seeing the road clearly enough during the night, it became quite a difficult task. If they ran too fast, they could easily trip into a roadside bump, injuring their legs in the process, but if they were too slow, it would be way too easy for the witch to catch up with them.

Alicia decided to let the horses run down the road, while the Priestess and herself would enter into the woods, which grew along the road. Making it quite hard for the enemy to find them without the help of fire.

Leaving the sound of the colliding weapons behind her, she pulled the Priestess by hand, only relying on the dim moonlight to identify the surrounding environment. Always moving away from the road, and further in the direction of the center of the woods. Increasing the possibility for them to meet with wild animals like vipers, but this would still be better than confronting the witch directly.

When the two stumbled across the foot of the Impassable Mountain Range, Alicia finally felt a little relieved, it seemed the witch had given up on her pursuit. With the exception of some bird cries, the surroundings were now completely silent.

“What are we going to do now?” Mira asked.

Even knowing what could happen it seemed that she wasn’t very scared. Seeing how calm the priestess was, Alicia’s heart was full of admiration, “Priestess, we should look for a place to rest, and stay

there to rest for the night. At dawn, we will then return back to Longsong Stronghold and seek support from there.”

“Shouldn’t we go into the direction of Border Town? From here, we will at most need a day and a night to reach the stronghold.”

“No,” said Alicia, shaking her head. “Meeting an extraordinary here is too coincidental. I suspect that the Lord has already associated himself with the witches, and with this, it is too dangerous for us to go to the town.”

“What you say makes sense” But then the Priestess’ eyes became large and she looked straight behind Alicia.

Seeing her reaction, Alicia’s heart sank. And indeed, when she turned around, she saw the witch dressed in her black robe slowly stepping out of the dark shadows, her eyes were sparkling like stars, and an owl was hovering over her shoulders.

Chapter 171 - The Gift Of Revenge (Part 2)

“Demon!” Alicia drew her two-hand sword and stepped protectively in front of Mira.

“... Demon?” Her voice was cold, didn’t bare any emotion, “That’s the way, you call those orphans and abandoned babies who are sent to the monastery to get raised, from whom you chose your own witches?”

“What are you talking about!?” The warrioress snapped back, “The church shelters them because of God’s kindness. Without the Church’s mercy, how many of them would be able to survive until their day of adulthood? But the pervasive Devil will always corrupt the weakest of them, leading a very small number of girls astray. But as soon as it is discovered that one of them degenerated into a witch, the Church will immediately treat the fallen ones. You are totally turning the cause and effect upside down!”

Hearing the word “treat”, the golden pupil of the witch dimmed by a lot, raising her large sword with one hand she declared. “I’m not too interested in persuading a dead person anyway. So be it.”

Even before her voice had faded away, the owl spread her wings and flew into the sky, and the witches figure rushed forward. Alicia could still clearly remember how her comrades had tragically tried to defend themselves and had instead been split in two, so she decided, I will never retreat, I have to advance forward.

Facing the right-handed extraordinary, she threw herself to the

lower right sight just like she had trained in her fencing lesson. Her instructor had mentioned it more than once, if the enemy is heavily relying on their right hand, the bottom right will be the most difficult position for them to reach. After all, their sword grip is limiting their movement, so if they wanted to change the direction of the blade, they would first need to spend an additional half a breath to change their grip.

Closely avoiding the beheading strike with her leopard like dive, she immediately grasped her own two-handed sword and slashed at her the moment she passed the enemy's body. But the extraordinary reaction was too fast, with a small jump she easily avoided Alicia's counter swept, and also simultaneously changed the direction of her greatsword.

Until now, Alicia hasn't even landed yet.

Within a flash, the sword cut through half of her calf, with it sending blood into the sky. Sending a tearing pain throughout her whole lower body, almost making her lose her consciousness. Instinctively gritting her teeth, she was luckily strong enough not shout out on the spot from the pain.

The gap is too great.

She now understood, how hard had Abrams task been to give them so much time to escape, after all, he was able to exchange ten or so moves with the extraordinary.

Alicia struggled to turn around, she was just in time to see how

Mira removed a hidden hand crossbow from her back, and see her raise her hand and aim it at the body of the unaware extraordinary witch.

This is my last chance, she realized, perhaps, if I'm able to grab her attention!

But before she could even think about what she could say, a greatsword swept over with the force of a whirlwind. She then only felt her throat became tight, and then her world had turned upside down...

No, perhaps it's I who am flying, and then, she saw how her own body was unable to support itself any longer and fell onto its knees. At the same time, she saw the owl flew over in the direction of Mira. Turning into a girl in midair and severely hitting the official... Afterward, Alicia's line of sight quickly began to blur, as she finally hit the ground, falling into a boundless darkness.

...

"That damned stone!" Maggie touched her head while complaining out loud, "You were too careless, if it wasn't for my help just then, you would have been hit by that crossbow's arrow!"

"Rest assured, I had already noticed, I was just intending to end this quickly," using her sword, Ashes quickly dug out a shallow pit. And after plundering their bodies she then immediately threw them into the pit and covered it once more with mud. By putting the plundered God's Stone of Retaliation and gold royals into her

own bag, she now had enough money on her to pay for her way to the Port of Clearwater.

On the body of the woman who had worn the robe she had also found a letter, roughly skimming over it, she had discovered that the contest of the letter only became relevant if Roland Wimbledon, Lord of the Western Territory, was not collaborating with the witches. In this case they had offered to buy baby girls and orphans from him, exactly as they had done previously with Duke Ryan. As long as the women were still minors they would buy all of them, and also pay the regular “market” price. Furthermore, they could also help him if he wanted to be paid with pills.

Reading the letter Ashes began to sneer in disgust, placing it over the torch to lit it up, burning it one and all.

“Come on, we have still some other bodies left to bury.”

“Goo.” Maggie changed into an owl, then guided Ashes back to the site of their first attack.

Digging, carrying, burying the men... Unable to help with this physically strenuous tasks, Maggie wasn’t too busy. In addition, seeing the disabled limbs, the cut off arms and smelling the air that was reeking of blood made her all feel a little dizzy. So, she was now sitting on a branch, watching how as Ashes kept herself busy.

“For what reason was it so important for you yourself to do this? Wouldn’t it be bad if the Church finds out they are dead?”

“By the time they discover that their messenger group has disappeared, it will already be two or three months later,” Ashes explained, still using her sword as shovel,

“When they usually send out an envoy to investigate a witch incident, in the event that the Lord is cooperating with them, the investigation will still last much longer than one month, in addition to the time they will need to return, it would usually take them almost two or three months long.”

“But His Royal Highness wouldn’t have cooperated with them!”

“As long as you allow the messenger into the Town, the Witch Cooperation Association will be exposed. They don’t need to ask the Prince himself, they can just randomly grab hold of some people from the street and after torturing them they will soon know the answer. So, Roland is only left with two options, either selling off the witches and saying that he has nothing to do with them or kill the envoys by himself. But if the other side was to plan for something like that in advance, as long as even one of them was able to escape. Hermes would soon receive a message about it. After all, they are also carrying messenger pigeons with them.

“Pigeons can’t see the road at night, so I was be able to catch all of them,” Maggie said, patting her bulging pockets, “Just wait until tomorrow, we can go roast and eat them.”

Ashes was secretly shaking her head, previously she had never seen Maggie eat a bird, but now, after the first few days in Border

Town, she had actually developed a strong interest in them.

“The moment the Church decides to dispatch their army, he will only have one month left, but for now, as long as his luck is not too bad, he will be able to last for three more months... So, this is the gift I promised him, at the same time I also got my revenge on the Church.”

“So that was the reason, as expected of you, sister Ashes,” Maggie praised.

There was still something Ashes still didn’t say, with her killing them, Ashes had made the decision for the Prince, and when the Church finds out that they had lost contact with the envoys, they would certainly blame Roland Wimbledon for it. With this, he wouldn’t even get a chance to sell off the witches.

When everything had finally been properly put in order, the horizon had already begun to turn white.

“With this, it’s now time for us to part,” Ashes said.

“...” Maggie didn’t understand what she meant, “What?”

Ashes stepped in front of Maggie, squatted down and touched her small head, “You want to live in Border Town, don’t you? Here you have Lightning and Wendy, so you will certainly be very happy.”

“But...” Maggie lowered her head, a look of hesitation written on

her face, “I also like you and Lady Tilly.”

“It’s not the case that you will have to be here all the time,” Ashes laughed, “Roland Wimbledon, unlike Tilly, is an ordinary aristocrat, so it’s hard to be sure that he will always be on the side of us witches. So, your mission will be to fly back once a month, telling us everything that has happened in Border Town. Furthermore, you can also bring our messages to the witches of the Witch Cooperation Association, this way our two sides can establish regular contact. If the town is ever in any danger, you can also help them escape from the Kingdom of Graycastle and move to the Fjords.”

“It’s like that, is it!” Maggie blinked unsure of what to say.

“Yes, it is,” Ashes nodded. “I’m convinced that you can accomplish this.”

Seeing Maggie turning into a pigeon and gradually disappearing with the first rays of the morning sun, Ashes turned around, mounted a horse, and advanced in the direction of the Port of Clearwater.

Chapter 172 - New Drama

“That’s all for today. Class dismissed.”

“Good-bye teacher,” the little girls said in unison.

Irene closed the textbooks and watched how the children all walked away from the classroom. The building the class was held in had previously belonged to a former aristocratic residence, but after the Months of Demons, it had been seized by the Prince, and it has now been converted into this college.

The walls separating the small rooms upstairs and downstairs had been removed, changing the layout of the building into several larger rooms, which were able to accommodate four to six batches of students at the same time. According to the teaching material, these batches were called “classes”. During the day, classes were held for children and at night, they would be teaching the adults.

She had, at first thought, that it would take the City Hall a very long time before they would give an answer to her application for becoming a teacher, never really expecting that the day after Ferlin had submitted her application, she would already have obtained her permit. She had only needed to go to the City Hall to register her position, receive the teaching materials, and obtain a list of her assigned students.

She was responsible for teaching elementary knowledge to the children of the townspeople. She had spent a lot of effort on making sure that this group of little devils would listen to her

lecture. Within the teaching materials, there was also a whole chapter dedicated on how to maintain the discipline in the classroom. The tricks that were described were totally eye-opening to her.

In addition to the traditional oral criticism and using rattan for corporal punishment, there were also other excellent options that were discussed. For example, dividing them into small groups, to appointing a class leader and monitor, who would be responsible for controlling them and so on.

The person who wrote the textbook, must certainly be a senior, who has spent many years studying on how to teach, in order for him to take such care when describing of all of these problems, right?

Leaving the college, Irene saw her own personal knight Ferlin, waiting for her.

He was no longer dressed in his shiny armor, with its embroidered lion crest and sword, but even without it, he was still a very handsome man. His simple leather clothes brought out his tall and straight figure, coupled with the clear lines of his facial features, even with his empty hands, he was still the Morning Light that she remembered.

After giving him a hug, Irene noted that Ferlin seemed a little worried.

So, she asked, “What’s happened?”

“...” For a moment Ferlin hesitated, “His Royal Highness the Prince invited us this afternoon to enjoy some refreshments in the palace.”

Irene was rooted in place from the shock, “Us?” She could immediately guess what her husband was worried about. She patted his back then shook her head, “His Royal Highness has never seen me before, how could he be the same as the Duke... besides, won’t you also be there?”

“That’s right,” Ferlin firmly nodded. “This time, I’ll protect you.”

That afternoon, Irene who was now dressed, and deliberately wearing a decent dress, with her husband went together to the Lord’s Castle.

They didn’t have to wait for long after a guard led them into the reception hall and a gray-haired man then appeared at the entrance. There was no doubt that he was the Lord of the Western Territories, Lord Roland Wimbledon.

He was accompanied by a Lady who seemed to be around thirty years or just slightly older, who carried a calm and capable attitude but was still full of charm. From her facial features, it was clear that she must have been an outstanding beauty back when she was still younger. Seeing the Prince enter, Irene and Ferlin quickly stood up, bending into a bow.

“Welcome, Mister and Madam Eltek,” Roland sat at the seat of the Lord, “On the table there are only the finest culinary foods of the palace, do not hesitate to enjoy yourself, there is no need for you to be uncomfortable.”

“Thank you for your invitation to come here to enjoy the refreshments, it will be our pleasure,” Ferlin replied in accordance with the noble’s etiquette.

“The name of the lady at my side is Scroll, she is also the head of the Ministry of Education in the City Hall, I believe you should already have met with her previously.”

“Indeed,” he nodded, and then he turned towards Scrolls and nodded thankfully. “Until now I haven’t thanked you, without your permission, Irene would never have become a teacher so quickly.”

So it was all because of her help, Irene thought, casting a grateful smile to her.

After leisurely chatting for a while, Ferlin tentatively asked, “I wonder why His Royal Highness has called us to be here today, may I perhaps know the reason for it?”

“This is related to education,” Roland paused, looking to Irene. “I heard you used to work in the theater of Longsong Stronghold. Were you a theater actor?”

“Er...” Irene never expected that the Prince would direct the question directly at herself, “Officially, I have only performed once.”

“In that case, I am going to have a play at the town square every weekend,” the Prince said directly. “As for the script, the screenwriting, and the conductor, I have already arranged for all of them; I’m only in need of performers. And since you don’t have so many classes and have already played in a drama, I want you to become the star of the performance. Of course, there will be an additional salary for all of your work. I wonder if you would care to join?”

“...” Irene looked at the Prince with big round eyes, unable to believe what she had just heard, without even bothering to ask whether he was making fun of her, she nodded excitedly, “Your Honored Highness, I would really like that!”

Standing on the stage has always been her dream, but after leaving the theater in Longsong Stronghold, she knew that she might never again get the chance to play in a theater. But in front of Ferlin, she had never expressed this regret. Instead, she had buried her desire deep within her heart. But on this day, she unexpectedly got the chance to return to the stage. What more could she hope for?

“These plays will be performed for the masses to see, so my request from the actors won’t be high, it will be enough as long as they can deliver the story clearly. Maybe you have some friends in the theater of Longsong Stronghold who would also fulfill the conditions, who would want to go on stage, but never had the

chance? If you could write a letter to them, telling them that we will have a performance each weekend and that the payment will be the same as for the stronghold's theater.”

“I know a lot of them,” Irene said happy, “I'll write to them the moment I go back home, I think they'll be happy to get the chance to come and perform in Border Town!”

“All right,” Roland handed three books to her, “These are the scripts, they each have a number on their cover. Your performance will start with the first story. The content of it has been revised by Scrolls, and it should be very in line with the life of normal people. You can take these books back with you and read through them carefully. If there is something you do not understand, you can come to Scroll and ask.”

“Yes, Your Highness, thank you!” Irene bowed.

...

“Was that all right?” Scrolls later asked, “Do you think that all of those stories should really appear?”

“What is your concern? Do you believe that in their eyes, the Prince could never write such vulgar stuff.” Roland stretched his body, “And without your last modified polishing, the script could never have been completed in such a short period of time.”

“I do not think the story is too vulgar,” Scrolls shook her head.

“Although I do not know why you know so clearly about this, these are topics that concern the people. They are quite touching and thought-provoking, so the show will definitely be very popular.”

Of course, they will be popular, Roland thought, the first two scripts were modified versions of “Cinderella” and “The Rooster Crows at Midnight”, and had already been well-tested by the audience. The former describes a touching love story between a civilian and a member of the royal family, while the latter was about people of the lowest rank and their struggles against the unscrupulous landlord.

Of course, he had adapted them to the local conditions, such as changing the good fairy in Cinderella into a witch, and the landlord in The Rooster Crows at Midnight also become a fierce little aristocrat. Roland intended to achieve a far-reaching and long-lasting impact with his first two plays before he could release his third work, “The Diary of a Witch”, which was his true purpose.

This script had been completely written by him. It told the story of three children who all became witches, but each of their lives went in completely different directions. Instead of directly referring to the Church, he focused his attention on the fateful journey of these three girls: one girl had been abandoned by her parents, another girl had become a tool for others, and the last one was lucky and had parents who still loved her, and then gave their own life to protect their daughter.

Eventually, the three women would meet with each other by chance, help each other to prevail over those who want to sentence

them to death, and would try to blend in with the ordinary people to find their own happiness.

Roland intended to make the Diary of a Witch into a series, and with the help of the three views, he would reshape how the outside world would look at witches. With the twists and turns of the touching drama, imparting in them the thought that any of their relatives could become a witch, and it had nothing at all to do with the Devil.

Chapter 173 - Irene's Wish

When the two of them had returned home, Ferlin shook his head and reluctantly asked, “Couldn’t you have told His Highness that you would need a few days to consider the offer and before you could give an answer?”

On the way home, it had seemed that she was dancing rather than just merely walking. I’m afraid to say that the last time I’ve seen her so happy, was on the day of our wedding.

“That just wouldn’t do,” Irene stuck out her tongue, “Doing that would make it impossible for me to fall asleep at night.”

That was the way she was, her love for the theater was so strong that she could often be seen practicing her lines at the stronghold’s theater even during midnight. If it hadn’t been for the Duke, she could have already turned from the flower of the theater not only in name but also in reality, into star of the show. Thinking about this, he hugged his wife from behind and whispered into her ear, “I’m sorry, dear.”

“...” Irene patted his head comfortingly, “It wasn’t your fault, he transferred you to other cities, there was no way you could have stopped him.” Softly laughingly she continued, “If you want to waste your time apologizing, you should go into the kitchen and cook something, I would like to take a look at the scripts before anything else.”

“That’s alright, I’ll do it.” Ferlin gently kissed her earlobe, “I’m

going to make meat porridge, fried eggs, and a sausage to celebrate.”

In many ways the new home had been furnished differently compared to their old home. For example, the cooking stoves, in Longsong Stronghold, whether it were the aristocrats or the civilians, would all have an open stove in their main living room, while in their new home, they had a separate room for the oven.

The stove was surrounded by walls on three sides, with the backside of the stove directly connecting to the chimney. The intersection was even provided with a baffle plate which could be shifted horizontally, and when it was not needed anymore could then be closed, preventing the smoke from the other tenants from coming out of their stove.

Ferlin could easily think of several advantages with the new design, for example after closing the door, the living room also wouldn't be affected by the cooking fume or scent, and during the summer the stove also wouldn't increase the indoor temperature any further.

After filling it with firewood and wood chips, the flames soon started to rise, and he could now fully start concentrating on making tonight's dishes.

After having dinner, Irene continued delving into the scripts and she was only able to put the third book aside after the candle had reached its end.

“How are they?” Ferlin couldn’t help himself, he had to know how good the scripts were, after all, she had spent so much of her time reading them. Previous when she had still worked in the theater, she would read ten books just as thick as these in just half a day.

“Honestly... it is hard to describe,” Irene exclaimed in admiration. “All of the books are full of new ideas, I have never read these kinds of stories before. For example, in ‘Cinderella’, the prince isn’t in love with another princess, but instead he falls in love with a beautiful peasant girl. Yet this is not the most surprising part, what is surprising is that he insisted even until the very end to take the peasant girl as his wife.

“I even got to the point where I started to think, maybe the Prince has never read this story himself, if that is not so shouldn’t the incredible odd content of the improbable couple be giving birth to dissatisfaction in his heart? Despite that, the whole story was completely exciting. I could not help wanting to applaud when the Prince finally found Cinderella again, and then slipped the crystal shoe onto her feet.

” ‘The Rooster crows at Midnight’ was also fascinating, but when compared to ‘Cinderella’ I have to say it is a lot simpler. I think two or three scenes will be enough to show the story clearly. Furthermore, reading the paragraph where the serfs found the courage to resist the nobility was marvelous.

“After a long time of cowering, the serfs frame of mind had changed completely from where it was before, where they had to bear with it at all costs to the point of it becoming more than they

could carry was all perfectly depicted in the story... the feeling that breaks out after they finally decide to resist and let their passion burst out, seems to be coming directly out of the observer's heart!"

"Serfs fighting against the nobility?" Ferlin frowned, this was clearly something that the aristocracy would never tolerate. If the serfs of the Eltek Manor were to ever dare to raise their hoes and shovels against the housekeeper, I'm afraid my father would be showcase their heads in front of the manor's door on the very next day. "Does His Royal Highness really want you to perform a drama like that?"

"You are only asking that, because you haven't read the script," Irene threw him a cold look, "after reading it, you will feel the same as I do. That they were meant to stand up and resist, and not allow themselves to be oppressed any longer.

"The small lordling's bullying has become intolerable, so he now had to face the importance of human life. In the end, they still only put the noble into a bag and beat him up ruthlessly, if you ask me, they were still too restrained. Later on, in the story, when the nobles want to kill all the serfs, they were then saved by a witch that happened to be passing by.

"She then became a well-known local image for the aristocracy, reminding them of what would happen to evil people. Later on, in a debate that was taking place, a foreign lord made a wise and benevolent decision, he bought all the serfs, and then promoted them to free people! I bet the whole crowd will erupt into cheers when we get to that point."

But, the aristocracy will certainly protest, Ferlin thought disapprovingly, and with that, the theater will then be placed under pressure from the nobility. Which will finally lead to the dissolution of the crew... Hang on, he suddenly realized that there lived no other noble in Border Town beside Sir Pine and His Royal Highness, while the latter was even the one who formed the crew.

In other words, does His Royal Highness actually intend to only show the dramas to the civilian population? It will be impossible to even earn a few copper royals from their hand, ah. But the actor's payment will also be the same as it was in the Longsong Stronghold, from the start it was given that this business would turn over a loss. Does His Royal Highness plan to show the dramas just for the entertainment?

"But dear," Irene said, not noticing the changes in Ferlin's expression, "Although the first two stories were already totally exciting, compared with the third one 'The Diary of a Witch', those two are nothing! I dare bet that even in Redwater City, King's City or any other of those big cities, if they read this the theaters would start immediately recruiting a crew for it, even with special rehearsal and advance advertising! I have to say, Scrolls really is a genius writer. The book 'The Diary of a Witch', no matter if it is in the story's content or its style of narrating, they are all far more advanced than any of today's dramas."

"Are you sure?" When Ferlin saw her solemn expression he had to fight hard not to laugh, "In Longsong Stronghold even I could often hear Mister Kadin Faso famous name, his "Delicate Rose" and "Prince seeking for Love" are works which were praised by all, even outside of our kingdom's borders. I've even heard that other kingdoms have sent their own troupes to observe and learn from

him, do you think that this drama could be better than any of these classic plays?”

“Of course, I’m sure. Or do you doubt my vision, dear!” She began to roughly tell him the story, “Not to mention the plot, even its narrative technique is something you have never seen before. Compared to the dramas of the past, where you listened to the story in the third party, this story focuses firmly on the perspective of the three witches for the whole time. Even though the decisions of the three of them all have a far-reaching impact on each other, they have no knowledge about this.

“But near the middle of the story, their seemingly unrelated strings finally gather together in the same place, and from then on the three witches form one inseparable whole. I have to say, this new narrative style of developing several storylines at the same time will certainly cause a sensation without a doubt. Of course, this won’t only be restricted to Border Town, I even wonder how many people can understand what level it had reached.”

She excitedly got a pen and paper, to immerse herself into writing the letters, “That’s out of the question, I have to quickly call my theater’s partner to come over, I really want to see the surprised looks on their faces!”

Ferlin however, stepped forward to grasp her hand, “Hold on, Irene, don’t you feel... that the story is too contrary to common sense?”

After listening to his wife’s repetition, he also felt that the whole story was very exciting. Showing both the good and the evil side in

humanity's nature, that the good and evil, were both overlapping each other, but its description of the witches and the church's interpretation were fully opposed with each other.

Moreover, its content was also too delicate. For example, the third witch due to the concern and care of her family, could release and develop her ability freely, ultimately discover that the story of the demonic bite was nothing more than a lie.

Now with the exception of their ability to control magic there was no longer any difference between the witches and the ordinary people. They also only want to laugh, cry, meet their loved ones and grieve brokenheartedly when their loved ones pass away. Is His Highness, Lord Roland not afraid that news of this will spread, is he not afraid that the Church will come?

“Violate common sense? No ... Ferlin, before they become a witch, they are ordinary girls, right?”

“Well, that’s right.”

“Then what if it was me?” Irene looked with wide open eyes at Ferlin, “If I became a witch, would you think that I am evil?”

“No, of course not,” Ferlin quickly answered. “You’ll always be the good girl I know.”

“Then if we give birth to a daughter, and she became a witch?”

“Of course that would be even more impossible.” He quickly closed his mouth, suddenly understanding in his heart what his wife wanted to say to him. Evaluating an unknown witch, and one relative with whom one has lived together from morning to the night as evil, were completely different.

“Yes,” Irene nodded with satisfaction, “If we really got a witch...”

He knelt down on one knee, taking the position used when swearing allegiance and said: “In that case, I would be just like the father of the third witch within the story, like him, I would do my best to take good care of her.”

“That’s a qualified answer,” She put the quill down and laughingly said. “I think... we can try it now.”

“As you bid, my dear,” he whispered softly into her ear, only to then pick her up and walk directly into the bedroom.

Chapter 174 - Industrial Park

Two days after Ashes departed, beyond all expectation Maggie returned to Border Town, once more appearing in front of everyone.

After understanding the reason, her return then turned into a warm welcome for a new member of the Witch Alliance.

She was greatly moved by the banquet which was a celebration in her honor and was also being held in the castle's back garden. The top of a long iron shelf had been covered with all kind of meat which was free for anyone to take and barbecue.

The range of seasoning was also very rich, there were salt, oil, chilies, peppers, as well as Roland's personally created barbecue sauce. Which was made from cooking a stew made out of all kinds of different mushrooms from the Concealing Forest together with a whole chicken. He also added a mixture out of salt, sugar and wheat flour, which let him forget the non-existent Monosodium Glutamate (MSG). Maggie almost ate to the point of bursting her stomach before she stopped.

On the afternoon of the same day Roland also tested her ability.

According to Nightingale's judgment, her magical capacity when compared with all the other witches could be described as among the medium level. Furthermore, her ability to freely change any kind of bird was only possible on the premise that she had seen it before. Changing her form used up a comparatively large amount

of magic, and during one day she could change her form around 4 to 5 times, while maintaining her shape only consumed very small amount of magic. Her ability could be classified as belonging to the summon type and was also suppressed by the God's Stone of Retaliation. Her favorite bird to change into was the pigeon, but Roland noted that she would always be a lot bigger than the regular bird no matter in what kind of bird she changed into. For example, if she turned into a sparrow, in Roland's view, her sized would equivalent to a common pigeon, while if she was to change into a pigeon, she had almost at the same size as a sea eagle.

This point left Roland feeling quite sad that Maggie was incapable of changing into any of the fantasy creatures he had painted for her such as a Phoenix, Griffin, or a Kunpeng.

In addition, to Ashes original intention there was still something else he had to pay attention to, that was the question of, what kind of abilities did the witches gathered by Tilly possess? In case she had many auxiliary witches who could significantly increase the efficiency of farming, he didn't mind to exchange for them with his technology.

For this reason, Roland decided to write a long letter addressed to Tilly. He started with showing her that they were in a natural alliance, and then warned her about the Church's intention to unify the continent, and lastly he handed her an olive branch, expressing his desire that they could help each other and in so doing that they could progress together. Now he only had to wait until Maggie went to the Fjords next month, and permit her to deliver the letter without having to go through an extra effort.

The next day, the Prince was welcomed by another piece of good news.

The factory for the production of the steam engines has finally been completed. It was located on the opposite shore of the Redwater River, on the western side, next to Leaves' experimental field. The entire site was surrounded by a wooden fence, there was also had a smooth and simple road leading to the pontoon bridge. In Roland's plan, this area would, in the future, be turned into an industrial park.

As a result of his wish to expand the building space to far out as was possible, the factory was built using a comparatively easy to use wood material, covering an area of about 1000 square meters. Anna's self-built machines had also already been shipped in. There were two steam-driven boring machines, two manual milling machines, a manual grinding machine as well as a manual lathe.

Although the machines were quite simple, at least in theory, its workmanship was nonetheless of the best quality. Apart from the pedals and the other similar parts which were made out of wood, all the other parts were made out of wrought iron or cut out of steel. It could be said that it had been processed from the best materials currently in existence and with the highest possible precision.

Roland feared that he currently would only have ten workers that could come to work in the factory. They were the former town blacksmiths and their apprentices who had seen his presentation in the castle backyard and were now recruited by Roland with a fixed monthly salary of fifty silver royals so that they could learn

how to operate the high-end machines. The blacksmiths, together with their forging tools, would all move into the brick house that stood outside the factory. Yet with the exception of some unimportant parts, the steam engine would soon be produced by using only these machines.

To celebrate the opening of the factory and to strengthen morale, Roland decided to gather all the City Hall officials and held a ribbon-cutting ceremony and together with a short speech in front of the factory building. With Echo's simulation of a gun salute, Graycastle Industrial Company had formally announced its establishment.

During the next few days, as the company's executive Roland came to visit the factory several times. Demonstrating the uses of the machines in person as well as oversee the steam manufacturing process in general.

The best way Roland could think of to let the illiterate blacksmith grasp the processing and assembling of a steam engine was to map the whole process out. Following the usual process of creating a simple manual, he labeled every part with a name, number and size. Afterward, he used a diagram to show the installation order and the connection pattern. With this task, Soraya had also helped him tremendously in making sure that he could finish this task quickly.

The first few days of production went exactly as he had expected, almost no part that they had made had met the requirements, not even to speak of trying to piece together a whole steam engine.

However, Roland didn't care about the scrapping rate, in the hands of Anna, in just the blink of an eye, these formerly defective products were soon remade into a new plate. And he believed that with repeated practice, it was only a matter of time before these blacksmiths mastered the production methods to be used in the new era.

In addition to the industrial factory, the Prince also changed the backyard at the North Slope Mine into his own military factory and was now mainly using it for the production of revolver rifles and bullets. Since by now, Karl's recommended "furnace expert" Lesya had also arrived at Border Town, a new batch of airbags had been installed, substantially increasing the temperature of the furnaces, even making it possible to independently calcining cement powder, making the former calcination room obsolete.

But limited by the current crafting ability, the revolver rifles and bullets production was still completely in Anna's hands. At this moment, Roland was still busy designing a bullet stamping sheet for a stamping press, although its cutting efficiency wouldn't be as good as Anna's direct forming, it could at least reduce her burden.

And also, to thank Anna for nearly half a month of rushed work, he had decided to send her a gift.

"A gift?" Anna put down the recently cut part that was still in her hand and stroked a strand of hair that had slipped in front of her forehead back behind her ear, revealing a brilliant smile, "Well?"

“Don’t you want to know what kind of present it is?” Roland teased her.

“En...” she earnestly reflected on it, and after a moment before she said. “I like all the presents that you’ve given me.”

After six months of being nursed back to health, there was now no longer any traces to discover of her time spent in the dungeon. Where she had previously been thin and weak she was now slim, her blues eyes brimming with spirit. Dressed in a white dress she seemed to be fresh and cool, her whole body seemed to be filled with vitality.

This is what an 18-year-old girl should look like.

When he saw Anna, Roland was unable to stop the corner of his mouth from raising, every time he saw her his mood would always become a lot better.

The so-called “gift” was covered in a layer of linen and placed in the castle courtyard to ensure Anna’s surprise. He had gotten this idea when he had seen how Ashbringer had covered her sword. Since he was the Prince, the gift of course also had to be something special. Presenting something like jewelry or other similar finished products showed off much less sincerity, so he had to think for a long time before he came up with an idea.

When Roland pulled away the linen, a basket weaved with rattan appeared before them, to which the end of many ropes had been tied with the other sides and connected by a vast canvas.

“This is... what?” Anna walked closer and begun to circle around it full of curiosity.

“A hot air balloon,” Roland replied with a smile, “It can take you up into the sky, overlooking the earth like a bird in the sky.”

“Flying up to the heaven?” She turned around, her eyes flashing with excitement, “Can it really do that?”

Soaring into the sky has been the dream of mankind since ancient times, from a hang glider to a hot air balloon, from the airship to the aircraft, for the exploration and challenge of this, humanity has already paid a huge price, but mankind has never given up on its pursuit. Even though witches have always existed in this world, flying was still only a right for the minority. The scenery from up high was bound to leave a deep impression in someone.

“Of course, you just have to fill the airbag at the end of the ropes with hot air.”

Roland had arranged for Nightingale, Lightning, and Maggie to work as emergency personnel. In the case of an accident, with the help of Lightning together and Maggie in her large sea eagle form, the two of them would be able to land safely. As for the other witches, he decided to temporarily not inform them of this, especially Wendy and Scrolls, they would certainly have opposed any of his adventures. In their eyes, he should absolutely never come even close to even the slightest mishap.

Chapter 175 - Hot Air Balloon Tour

The principle of a hot-air balloon was very simple. To produce it one only had to make their way through a few difficulties, the first part was the burning device, and the second was the airbag.

The first point, in the absence of pressure vessels that could provide gas fuel, he had to rely on firewood or charcoal to heat the air. However, the efficiency of this was too low and he had to come to accept that he wouldn't be able to fly with it very far with it.

This also meant that the principle of hot air balloon travel had been discovered much earlier than in Roland's original world, but nevertheless, there was a reason why they had only been able to use it in real combat after the development of hydrogen balloons came along. Roland however, could abandon the burning device altogether, and instead let Anna take over for the heating.

The second problem was to make the airbags airtight, but regarding this issue, it was something that Roland could at least use the experience of his predecessors for, and easily solve the problem by using a sandwiched fabric. The outer layer of the balloon was made out of a wear-resistant canvas, the center layer was made out of the intestinal epithelium of cows, and the inner layer was made out of a light gauze. With this, he was able to prevent leakage, while it also meant that he would not have to be afraid of it being pecked at by birds.

Roland propped up the opening at the bottom of the air sac, allowing Anna to raise the inside temperature with the help of her common flame. It started to slowly begin to bulge up, seemingly to

be like a melted wax gourd. By taking into account that the hot air balloon would have to carry two people, the maximum diameter of the balloon needed to be at least at five meters, using up the intestinal epithelium of twelve cows, and its sewing lasted almost for a whole week. If it wasn't for the fact that he was the Lord of the town, it would never have been possible for him to make such a big toy.

"Does it fly by using the buoyancy provided from hot air?" Anna asked. "I remember that hot air will always rise up."

"Yes, hot air rises, while cold air sinks, this is a common natural phenomenon. Using the particle theory to explain it, due to the air being hot, the particle's movement will be intensified, increasing its diffusion into the surrounding, and with the expansion of the volume, its density will become smaller. While the density of the surrounding air doesn't change, the air in the balloon becomes lighter in comparison, causing it to rise."

When Roland finished explaining the principle, he discovered that with the exception of Anna who showed a "so that's the reason" expression, the other three witches were at a loss, seeing this he couldn't stop himself from secretly lamenting about the importance of innate talent.

When the balloon was completely inflated, it began to float up and slowly straightened the draglines. Roland took the lead and entered the basket first. Afterward, he helped Anna to climb into it.

"I'm still a bit worried about this," said Nightingale, "maybe it

would be better if you let me try it out first.”

“Trust me, nothing will happen,” Roland smiled soothingly. “And even if we run into something unexpected, there is still Lightning.”

“You can rest assured, I will catch them.” Lightning patted her chest confidently.

“There’s also me, goo!” Maggie vouched, while imitating Lightning’s appearance.

With a shake, the balloon’s basket took off from the ground, gradually climbing up. Before long, they had crossed the top of the castle, and the whole town started to spread out in front of them.

To Roland, seeing such a scene wasn’t something new, after all, he had looked out of a skyscraper. But in Anna’s view, it was a new experience, it was a perspective that she had never seen before. She leaned over the edge of the gondola and looked out of it, grabbing at Roland’s arm with one of her hands, seeming totally excited while also being nervous at the same time.

This was the first time that Roland had seen her showing such an expression, it’s probably because her two feet have never been far away off of the ground before. So, flying in the sky for the first time, I presume it is naturally that she will have a slight fear of heights.

Soon, the basket which was tied to a hemp rope had also reached its limit finally stopping its rise. The hemp rope was about 50 meters long, in other words, it was around the height of a fifteen to sixteen-story building. Roland let Anna reduce the fire so that the hot air balloon could begin to hover within the air.

Lightning who had stayed close the basket for the whole time, but now where she saw the balloon was safely flying in the air she felt assured and thus she started a game of catch with Maggie around the hot air balloon.

When looking down from this height they could clearly see the castle roof, the constructions taking place all across town, the Redwater River flowing from west to east and the green farmland on the other side of the river.

“How do you feel?” Roland asked with a smile as Anna retracted her hand.

“Thank you for your gift,” she said excitedly. “It turns out that even I could fly so high.”

“You can even fly higher,” Roland sat down next to the side-wall of the rattan basket. “If the following hemp rope was longer, we could fly even ten times higher, but up there the airflow is much more chaotic, and it would become harder for us to still stay safe. Furthermore, this is only the first aircraft, just wait until I invent a piston machine, then even ordinary people can fly faster and higher than even the birds, and then...” He looked up at the blue sky full of hope in his heart, “humanity will one day fly out of this world and into the boundless space.”

“...” Anna held her breath, her eyes were shining and full of expectation for what was to come.

“I cannot guarantee that we will be able to fly out of the world,” Roland became amused by seeing her appearance, “but creating a piston machine, so that even ordinary people can fly around like the birds, the rest of my life should still be enough time to achieve that.”

In fact, with Anna’s capabilities, I won’t have to face any sort of bottlenecks during the processing, but the currently existing materials are so short of the needed quality. Low-quality pig iron is good enough to create steam engines while wrought iron is sufficiently good to produce guns with, and together with Anna’s black fire to create steel producing revolver-rifles is also no problem. But to build an internal combustion engine, I am afraid I need high-quality iron, steel or aluminum for that.

“That Border Town was able to achieve its current appearance, this is all because of your contribution, ‘Miss Anna’.”

After hearing these words, Anna stared blankly into the distance. After a while, she sat down and softly said, “My mother died in a fire, while I wasn’t buried inside of the thick smoke and the raging inferno and contrary to my expectation I instead became a witch. For a long time, I thought it was my awakening that had led to the fire, ending in the situation that I became extremely disgusted with myself for being a witch. Then, when I was imprisoned for being a witch, I thought that this was the way in which I could die in relief, but you saved me and took me out of prison. Teaching me

how I could use my ability... I would never have expected that in addition to destroying and bringing pain, my flame could also bring so much usefulness. "Anna paused, "That I was able to meet you, I should already feel very satisfied, but now I have discovered that my way of thinking has already changed. Sometimes my heart feels oppressed, and I feel unwell, hoping for even more."

She held onto Roland 's shoulder, "Even if it is like this, do you still want to hire me?"

Her lake like blue eyes sparkled in the sunlight and blowing her breath directly into his face, giving him a somewhat itchy feeling. Through their thin clothing, he could feel her soft body and her racing heartbeat. Despite all of this, she did not avoid his view, she was looking straight into his eyes. In the absence of Nightingale, she was full of enthusiasm and now even took on the initiative.

"Out there ..."

Even before Roland was able to finish, Anna had already sealed his lips.

When they separated, he gasped, "I want to hire you, all the way, Miss Anna.

"Ok."

This time, he took the initiative, lowering his head and closing the distance.

...

“Hey” Maggie who had already been chasing Lightning for a while now, suddenly felt an emergency and stopped in the sky, looking at the empty basket, “They’ve disappeared! Goo!”.

“Ah?” After a short glance back Lightning said, “They just sat down.”

“Don’t they want to see the outside scenery?”

“They can always take in the landscape later, but they don’t get many opportunities like this one.”

“Opportunities?” Maggie shook her wings and landed on Lightning’s shoulder. “I don’t understand goo, should we go and take a look goo?”

“That won’t do,” Lightning said, hugging the pigeon. “It is a sacred ritual that cannot be interrupted.”

“Goo?”

“In short, I can only tell you that you will understand it in the future. Until then it’s better for you not to see it, at least that was what my father, the greatest explorer ever, told me.” Lightning tossed Maggie into the air, “Now it’s your turn to run, and my turn

to chase you!"

Chapter 176 - The Answer At The Bottom Of One's Heart

The hot air balloon stayed in the air for around half an hour. Afterward, it slowly came to land in the castle courtyard.

When the basket of the balloon landed, it attracted the attention of all the other witches who had surrounded the waiting Nightingale one after another, and by now nearly all of the members of the Witch Alliance had gathered together in this place. Scrolls who had recently returned, from the City Hall had even run the whole way back. When she had arrived after taking a worried look up at the sky, as if she was afraid that a huge balloon would drop from it, she immediately requested to be informed about the situation.

The moment the Prince had climbed out of the basket, Scroll and Wendy immediately went over, bursting into a lecture, advising him again to not put his own life into so much risk. The Prince, however, defended his behavior using the novelty of the toy as an excuse and flipping the topic around at them. Nightingale who felt that the situation was actually quite funny and was on her way up to meet them, suddenly felt how her heart turned stiff stopping instantly in her place.

She'd seen the overflowing joy within Anna's eyes when Roland had helped her out of the basket, staining her cheeks with a slight blush. Her flax colored bangs was skewed to one side, with the aid of a small hairpin which reflected the silvery within the sun.

Nightingale recalled how he had polished a piece of silver during

the time when he was at the factory, guiding the blacksmith on how to operate those heavy machines.

Had His Highness personally made this hairpin?

Soon the other witches began clamoring that they also wanted to take a tour on the balloon, and like that the balloon began to rise again, this time with Anna and Nana standing on board.

Nightingale, however, stood outside of the crowd, staring at the hot air balloon, seeing it become smaller and smaller.

In her mind there was only one thought, Anna's face, brimming with a gentle smile.

Usually, Anna's face would always show a calm and neutral expression, rarely exposing any other type of expression. During her journey to the Witch Cooperation Association, within those large cities Nightingale had met many people displaying a similar smile.

So, she knew what it meant, it was clear that His Royal Highness and Anna had not only simply taken in the scenery up in the sky. Even though Maggie and Lightning had still been around, making it impossible for them to take it to the last step. But as long as the idea came up even once, it would become difficult for them to suppress it again. She suddenly felt like a piece of her heart had become empty.

Although she had thought that she had made her decision long ago, having to see it turn into reality, Nightingale discovered that she was far less prepared for it than she had ever imagined.

Wanting to be alone she went to a corner and leaned herself against the wall to sit back down, watching everyone with a disturbed look, while her head was a complete blank.

When the hot air balloon had landed once more, and Nana had stepped off of the basket, Leaves immediately seized the opportunity and climbed into the basket.

When Nightingale came back to herself, she discovered that Roland was no longer in the courtyard, he had most probably returned back to the castle, busying himself with his work, maybe lecturing over one of his books. She also had to go back to the office, she needed to always stay at the Prince side, just as she had done in the past. But when Nightingale stood up, she found that she was unable to take the next step. She really didn't know how she should face Roland right now, even in the case that she entered her own space so that he couldn't see her, she still knew, seeing now his face full of happiness would only make her feel all the more uncomfortable.

Wendy came over after the hot air balloon had gone up and down several times, "Why don't you go over and try it for yourself? It's a great experience to see the town from up in the sky."

If right now there was anyone else that she could not face even less than His Highness, it would be Anna. So hearing this suggestion caused Nightingale to jump up in panic and exclaim,

“No, I really have to go back to the office.”

The moment she finished speaking she entered her fog. But after taking two step she suddenly came to ask herself, why am I using my ability in the yard? Turning around, looking back, she was just in time to see how Wendy looked all over the place with an expression of wonder on her face, gnashing her teeth, she took the next step.

...

After dinner, she immediately returned back to her bedroom, while looking upwards, she fell backward onto the bed.

Today, even until the very end, she had never shown her figure in the office. The times when His Royal Highness had tentatively shouted her name, she had only tapped his back twice with her hand, showing him that she was still there. And even when Roland placed the salty fishes she usually loved so much on top of the table, she still wasn't in the mood to compromise, having none of them.

“What's going on? What happened to you today?” Wendy also came back to the bedroom and closed the door behind her. “While I've seen everyone else riding on the hot air balloon, I only saw you sitting alone at the side.”

“It's Nothing,” Nightingale said, turning herself away.

"It's obviously that there is something going on," Wendy sat down at the bedside, turning Nightingales' body around. After staring at her for a moment, she continued. "I thought you understood that you can tell me anything."

"..." The latter closed her eyes, only after a long while did she quietly murmur, "it's because of Anna."

"Anna?"

Nightingale did not want to speak about these kinds of disturbing things, after all, this would only make feel even more petty. Since the first witch His Highness had met had been Anna and not her. But on the other side, if she didn't speak about it, the pain in her heart it would only become stronger, and even harder for her to bear.

Furthermore, Wendy had always given her a lot of help when she had needed it. Whenever she was confused, the first person she always thought of who could help her would be Wendy, she had never let her down. Thinking of this, she gently held on to Wendy's hand and began to talk about her issues.

After listening to Nightingales' story, Wendy sighed, "I knew that Anna didn't understand the importance of that matter, but you also don't get it? The last time I had already reminded you that he cannot be together with a witch. As the King, Roland Wimbledon will need to have children to inherit his kingdom, because of this aspect, he can never choose a witch to be his wife."

“He will.”

“What?” Wendy was startled.

“Lord Roland will marry a witch,” Nightingale said, opening her eyes, one after another, “He had said so himself!”

She had wanted to keep this message deeply hidden at the bottom of her heart, but now she could now longer bear the feeling of it not being taken seriously.

Wendy seemed to be frightened by the news, after a while, she asked with a frown, “Are you sure of this?”

“Yes,” Nightingale confirmed it once more and to make it clear as she repeated Scroll’s question on that day. “When it came to the question of ‘Are you likely to marry a witch?’ He only replied with, ‘Why not?’ You know my ability, you know that I can tell whether a person is telling the truth or if he is lying, and when he had given his answer, he had not been lying.”

Wendy suddenly grabbed Nightingale ‘s arm forcefully. “You’re only allowed to remember this, never speak about it again, not even to any of the other sisters of our Witch Alliance.”

“Why?”

“Because he is destined to become the King of Graycastle, and what does a King without any descendants mean? Even without

the Church, it would already become difficult to get the local aristocracy to support such a King! Therefore, this matter must be kept strictly confidential, you absolutely cannot talk with anyone about it! For now, all you have to do is to protect his safety. Do not forget, if he can become the King of Greycastle, or not, will also decides the fate of us sisters!"

Nightingale nodded her head, showing that she had understood.

"As for the matter that is bothering you," Wendy thought for a moment. "Do you want to take the seat of the Queen or do you just want to stay by his side?"

"Of course, I want to stay with him," Nightingale said without hesitation.

"Then aren't you already staying at his side?" Wendy smiled, "there will indeed only be one Queen, but even if he ascends the throne, he will still need your protection. Do you understand what I mean by this?"

Nightingale just blinked with her eyes, but she didn't reply.

"So, staying together isn't difficult, what's difficult for you is to accept the choice that you have to make," Wendy said, "if you cannot do it, you have to give up your position, or you have to take on the next step... As for this question, what would be the right choice, only you know the answer."

...

On the next morning, when Roland yawningly entered his office and opened the drawer, he discovered that the fishes had disappeared without leaving a trace.

Chapter 177 - The Will Of The Church

Within the Cathedral at Hermes.

The Pope's place remained vacant.

The three Archbishops sat side by side, and it was once more Archbishop Mayne who opened the discussion, "I heard that some unrest has broken out within the Kingdom of Eternal Winter?"

"Under the leadership of High Priest Coburn, the Judges stationed there are already dealing with that matter," replied Tayfun.

"In the end, what was the reason for the unrest?"

"If it hadn't been for those dregs that had been taken into the Church," Heather whistled, "after the Queen has been beheaded, most of the nobles have joined the Church and were integrated into the upper echelons of the Church because of your plan to compromise, Mayne. They turned a blind eye to the plundering taking place under the guise of arresting witches by the city guards. But, the common people cannot accept this procedure which also naturally birthed resentment."

"Heather, that had not been my plan," Mayne responded in annoyance, "This was a decree ushered in by the Supreme Pontiff. This way we can take over and control the kingdom within the shortest amount of time, rather than having to continue fighting against the nobility. Furthermore, there are also some outstanding

talents amongst them, winning them over should be a great help to us. As for those vermin, since their descendants can't inherit their privileges in any case, they should be all eliminated within the next generation.”

“Alright, since you were only following the decree of the Supreme Pontiff, I won’t say anything about this any longer,” Heather shrugged, “but those violators who have corrupted the reputation of the Church must be handed over to me.”

Mayne looked at Archbishop Tayfun, who was muttering to himself hesitantly, “I propose that for the time being we do not try to deal with them. When the turmoil has come to an end, it will still be possible for us to place the aristocracy under house arrest, but doing so now, so soon after they have joined the Church, it will only create an unease within their rank.”

“No!” Heather pounded on the table. “We can’t permit them to go against the fundamental rules of the Church. Any looting taking place in the name of the Church is a felony, and it is me who is the one in control of the rules and arbitration!”

“This time, for the purpose of the overall situation...”

“What I’m saying is in accordance with the big picture.” Heather directly interrupted the words that were about to come from Tayfun, “Do not forget that we have relied on our established image of being both fair and just to conquer the Kingdom of Endless Winter! If at this time we don’t strike a severe blow against those scum, the people of the Kingdom of Endless Winter will lose all of confidence in us! This is the foundation that the Church is

relying on and not those group of damned aristocrats. If you do not agree with me on this, I will directly go to the Pope and ask for his ruling!"

The Pope has no time to worry over such matters, nor is the foundation of the Church in the hands of the ordinary people, but rather it's decided by how powerful we are. Mayne sighed and decided to reach out to her so that she wouldn't get too excited about this matter. "Then will we ask the High Priest Coburn to escort them back to New Holy City so that they can face trial?

"That won't be necessary, I will personally head out," Heather said, "Recently, I've been rushing my matters here to get them finished. Furthermore, I should also be able to come back within two or three months. It is naturally that the more people who see a trial the better it will be, and King's City of the Kingdom of Endless Winter would be the best place to hold it."

"Are you sure about that?" Mayne frowned. "Right now, we have no free conductor who can protect you during your stay in the Kingdom of Endless Winter, if you are to encounter an extraordinary witch, you will be in great danger."

"Where should so many extraordinary witches be coming from?" Heather didn't accept Mayne's opinion as being worth considering, "Just give me a team of warriors from the Army of Judge that should be enough.

"If you insist." Mayne did not want to quarrel over this subject any longer, "There are still some other bad news I have to tell you. The Church's army had been unexpected repelled in the

Wolfsheart Kingdom near to Broken Castle. We have already lost more than twenty members of the God's Punishment Army and more than a hundred warriors of the Army of Judges, even with all of these losses we still weren't able to conquer Broken Castle."

"Twenty members of the God's Punishment Army?" Tayfun couldn't believe what he was hearing, "Who was the conductor?"

"Bell, and she's already confirmed dead."

"The conductor was killed? It seems that they actually met with an unexpectedly tough challenge." Heather interest was piqued, "The loss of so many members of the God's Punishment Army must really have given Lord O'Brian an intense headache."

"We cannot blame this on him after all, the Broken Castle is placed in special terrain. Their gate entrance is high up in the middle of the mountain, the distance between the road and the gate is around ten meters. Furthermore, they had also destroyed the wooden bridge using some unknown alchemist solution." Mayne explained, "According to the reports, they put up wooden ladders, and every time the God's Punishment Army tries to crawl up them, they would suffer under a strange flame attack. The defender would spout a white solution out of pipes installed above the gate. Soon after they sent it out, it began to vaporize and catch fire, changing into a blazing flame which would cling to a person's body.

"No matter what they tried to do, they still couldn't take it off. It only ended after they were completely burned through. Our troops are now trying to get into contact with our believers of the Church

that are within the city, their trying to see if they can start an attack from inside and outside at the same time.”

“I dare say the church in the city has already become a bloodbath,” Heather twitched her mouth “If we want that our attacks to get through, the right move can only be to send out more people. The Alchemist will never be able to produce their solution on masse, sooner or later they will eventually run out of supply.”

“You are talking about our God’s Punishment Army!” Tayfun became so enraged that his beard started to tremble, “Do you know how difficult it is to convert someone into a member of the God’s Punishment Army? Right now, we don’t even possess one thousand of them, and if we have to use force to unify the country we will lose more than half of them, what should we then use to resist the demonic beast attack during the Months of Demons? Not even to mention our fight against the Devils afterward.”

“Do not fight,” Mayne said, “I will tell you this one piece of news, so it will be unnecessary for you to argue over the method of attack. At this moment, the Church needs as many members of the God’s Punishment Army as possible, and now that the Kingdom of Endless Winter is under our control, some things can be done that will be a bit more justifiable. In the past, those “seeds” had been delivered twice each year. But now, I have requested an additional delivery. With the Months of Demons even influencing the spring, its length is no longer as consistent, so from summer onwards, every season a new batch of seeds will be sent to the New Holy City, and the transformation ceremony can also be held correspondingly. The task to handle this matter will be handed over to you, Tayfun.”

“But there aren’t enough orphans and babies to provide the required number, ah,” the old Archbishop stroked his beard. “After all, not everyone will choose to abandon their child and send it to the church.”

“In that case, you had to find another way to provide enough. The Kingdom of Endless Winter is the kingdom in which we have operated for the longest time, because of this, most of the population are already part of our believers. In case that even within this land you’re still unable to provide enough manpower, swallowing the other three kingdoms will take even longer. Don’t forget, if there is ever be any unrest during the reunification process of the continent, we have to rely on the Army of Judges and the God’s Punishment Army to suppress them.“

“It isn’t the case that there aren’t enough people,” Heather explained with a smile, “There are as many children wandering the streets as there are stray cats and wild dogs. I have even heard that there were black street rats who especially went to hire those children. They are then trained into pickpockets, contractors, smugglers or scapegoats.

“Previously the nobility hadn’t gotten rid of them and instead offered them some places to hide, but now, thanks to Mayne’s gift, they’ve all become a part of the Church. As long as we cover the sewers, where can those mice go to hide? The only task left will be to send out the Army of Judges and try to clear up the underground, that way we can catch everything in one net. Doing it like this means you can harvest a lot of children, while the removal of those dregs will still gain us a good impression from the civilians at the same time. If we can also deter those who are beginning to stir up the nobles, we can succeed in three objectives

in one go, can't we?"

This is indeed a good solution, Mayne thought, no matter how extreme her temperament was whenever she was faced with had to face a problem, she would be the fastest person to come up with a countermeasure, so if for this ability he only had to ignore a few words coming from her, he would consider it a small price to pay. "Just carry on with this method. In short, before the fall, it is important that we conquer the territory of Wolfsheart Kingdom. So, that with the exception of the troops we need to maintain order, we can transfer all other warriors of the Army of Judges back to Hermes. During this year's Months of Demons, The enemy will only become even more powerful."

Tayfun, although reluctantly but he still nodded his head, "Also, the Kingdom of Dawn has already noticed the development in their neighboring kingdoms. The aristocracy within many cities are pointing their spearhead at the Church, there were already situations where they have plundered the churches then burned them down. I suggest we think about organizing a temporary evacuation of our believers. It really isn't necessary to waste them in such a conflict."

"No, that won't do, they have to resist," Mayne said, "The more sacrifices we have to make, the more reasons we will have later to retaliate." This is not a waste, but the seed of fire. They already don't have much faith in the Church, if we retreat out of the kingdom now, the Church will only appear to be even weaker.

"Well, I just wanted to mention it, nothing more," Tayfun gave up, "Lastly there is the Kingdom of Graycastle... ah, it is better if

you see it yourself,” saying this he took out a scroll from his sleeve and threw it in front of Mayne.

Mayne unfolded it and swept his gaze over the letters with his two eyes, the letter had unexpectedly come from the Queen of Clearwater, Garcia Wimbledon. It didn’t take long, and his eyebrows wrinkled up.

“Did she even hang her priest?”

“Not only him, she even fed all of our believers to the fishes,” Tayfun added, “and the church was then completely broken down even to the last stone. Plus, she should have already discovered the side effects of the pills.”

Heather smacked her lips, “I had already told you that it was only a matter of time. Even if they supplement their soldier unceasingly with those toys, with each new pill taken the effect would become smaller, until they die in the end because of weakness. Taking those pills and using them to destroy their armies was a good idea, but when its effect came to the surface, they will immediately discover what kind of game we are playing. The true problem is, if I remember correctly, that our spies had reported that only a small group of her soldiers have taken the pills, right? Instead it were the barbarians from the south who have eaten a lot of them.”

“Not more than a thousand, and she said that we will have to pay for them.” Mayne put the letter down, “It’s ridiculous, without the support of the Church, how could she have ever become the Queen of Clearwater? Where is Timothy Wimbledon right now? He also received our pills so why is he still delaying his attack on the

South?"

"He is currently plundering the North, he had set out to handle the attempted rebellion from the Protector of the Northern Border. He has to first stop this rebellion, to prevent any instability later. He probably wants to first take down several Duke's, and only then he will go face Garcia." Tayfun replied, "I just don't know if the new King, after capturing the North, will really make a beeline to the South or if he first goes to the Western Border, trying and take it back."

Chapter 178 - The Mysterious Secret Temple

“Ha ha ha...” Heather laughed out loudly, “It must not be expected that a chess-piece will stay completely obedient the whole time, and as long as it is consistence with our final goal everything will be alright. It doesn’t matter where he strikes, as long as the soldiers continue to consume the pills. Anyway, the Kingdom of Graycastle is the last one on our list, so there is still enough time left for them to fight it out. Furthermore, Roland Wimbledon didn’t reject our pills last time, right? Maybe when Timothy puts some pressure on the Western Territory, he will be prepared to accept them.”

That being said, the matter concerning the Queen of Clearwarter still caused some displeasure to Archbishop Mayne, after all, she was a piece he had personally selected. In case that Timothy, after conquering the rest of the Kingdom of Graycastle still didn’t fight a decisive battle with Garcia, and they instead stationed their troops between them to maintain the confrontation, the battle for the throne wouldn’t achieve desired outcome. Apparently it is time to adopt some different methods.

“There still isn’t any news from the envoy we’ve sent to the Western Border, so we will meet again after we hear from them,” Mayne decided. “Let’s end it here for today. Will the two excellencies act accordingly to the plan, I still have some other matters I have to attend to on Hermes.

“Oh, that’s right isn’t it,” Heather seemed to suddenly have remembered something, “Wasn’t today, the day of conversion? How many people have decided to participate in the conversion ceremony?”

“That is confidential information.” With this Mayne stood up and went straight out of the chamber, not turning around even once.

...

After walking on a seemingly endless stairway that was hanging in mid air leading to the bottom, the Archbishop crossed a mirror-like white millstone and went towards the depths of the Church’s core.

Different from its usual quiet, the core was quite lively today, a group of Judges were standing outside of the temple, waiting to be lead in. For most of them, it was their first time entering this place, so they were all busy looking around still full of curiosity. The moment they saw Mayne their hands went straight to their chest and they gave him a salute, “Your Excellency!”

He smiled and nodded in their direction. These Judges were the elite warriors of the church and they were fully devoted to God, sacrificing their life for the chance to be part of the God’s Punishment Army Conversion Ceremony, without having any guarantee of success. This was a point that they had to understand clearly before they could apply, but even so, they were still willing to give up their life for this great honor.

The eyes of the warriors were full of reverence as they looked at him. In this way, he passed the third checkpoint and came to the gate of the Central Secret Temple. The Pope’s personal guards

were already here waiting for him. They bowed to greet him, then pushed open the metal gate behind them.

Mayne followed the guards and stepped in behind them, through the gate. From this point onwards, he has entered the heart of Hermes, it was here that all of the Church's inventions and research took place.

There were no torches within the central secret area, because of this his vision suddenly darkened and only after a moment for him to adapt did he see a narrow passage appear in front of his eyes. The channels roof and walls have been fully covered with cast iron, and both sided of it were inlaid with fluorescent stones. These strange stones were a type of the God's Stone of Retaliation, and after soaking in demonic beast blood they began to emit a green fluorescence.

Reaching the end of the channel a cage appeared in front of him. After entering the cage, the guards activated the mechanism and it started to go downwards. The chain above their heads issued a crunching sound, which seemed to be especially ear-piercing within the narrow channel. Accompanied by this cacophony of sounds, the cage slowly sank into a hole in the ground, then suddenly Mayne's eyes were flooded with light.

An extremely spacious underground area suddenly appeared before his eyes.

No matter how often he had seen this scene, he would always be shocked by it anew, giving birth to a feeling of insignificance from his heart.

In accordance with common sense, buried so deeply underground, the cave should have been dark, pitch-dark. But here, the entire cave was illuminated by the light coming from the God's Stone of Retaliation. The God's Stone of Retaliation were spread over the whole cave, rising from the ground and forming several stalagmites like crystal flowers. Even the smallest stalagmites were so thick that it was nearly impossible for as many as ten grown men to encircle it. While the highest stalagmite almost reached the apex of the cave, even higher than the Hermes' Cathedral's Tower.

Their colors were also all differently having almost nothing in common with each other, the densest stalagmites of God's Stone of Retaliation were lavender, while the ones at the edge had changed from a dark blue to a light green. The smaller ones were even white, while the seemingly only recently emerged stalagmites had a near transparent body. The lavender colored God's Stone of Retaliation were the stones shining the brightest, especially the stalagmite which surpassed even the Cathedral's tower. Its brightness came close to the that of the full moon, making it possible to see the end of the cave without the help of a torch, but also allowing one to just faintly be able to see the ground.

Under the influence of such a large concentration of the God's Stone of Retaliation, the inside of the mountains could be regarded as being a magic free area. The God's Stone of Retaliation that were sold by the Church had all been mined from this place.

The space within the cave was large enough to accommodate five or six of Hermes' basilicas, and down here they had indeed built an exact replica of the cathedral that was above ground, called the

Pantheon. But the temple looked much older than the one that was on the top of the mountain. From high up in the air, Mayen could see a black iron gate in the mountain wall behind the temple. It led to the entrance standing at the foot of Hermes connecting it with the Old Holy City. So in a sense, this ancient building could be called the actual core of the Church, it has already existed long before the New Holy City had been established.

The cage took a quarter-hour to reach the ground. When Mayne could finally walk out of the cage, he straightened his robes and followed the messenger to the temple.

The conversion ceremony would be held in a hall of the temple.

Stepping into the hall, the light surrounding the Archbishop was no longer a cold blue-lavender but was instead an orange that was created by thousands of burning candles. Overhead there hung a three-tiered tower-like chandelier, and candle holders had been placed all around the hall. Looking at them through devote eyes they seemed like countless shaking stars. Thanks to all of the flames, the chilliness had been completely dispersed from the cave.

The man standing in the middle of the two conversion tables was the Supreme Pontiff of the Church, Pope O'Brien. He wore an eye-catching red-gold robe with gold-colored gemstones on his head and at the moment was carefully checking the conversion equipment, and finishing the last bit of preparations for the ceremony.

“Your Holiness,” standing before O'Brian, Mayne immediately kneeled down in worship and kissing the pope's fingers.

“Get up, son.” the pope slowly responded with a hoarse voice. “Besides the guards, no one else is here, there is no need for elaborate rituals.”

“Right,” Mayne stood up, but still couldn’t stop himself from becoming shocked. Compared with last time, the Supreme Pontiff now appeared to be much older, he had gotten deep wrinkles all over his face, and his skin now seemed to be an unhealthy shade of white, both loose and dull. Lastly, a lot of dense and eye-catching brown spots had appeared all over his body. Seeing the pope in such condition, the Archbishop’s eyes immediately became hot, “You’re... suffering.”

“This is a trace of time,” O’Brien muttered, “no one can fight against time, my life is running low, I’m afraid that I will never see the day when humans can defeat the devil. But, in this way I also don’t have to face the pain of the unknown anymore. Be that as it might, you have to keep on fighting until you’ve finally defeat the enemy or you’ve been defeated by them.”

If we fail again, we will ultimately perish, Mayne nodded, “I will do my duty until even the very last minute.”

“Very well,” the old man smiled in satisfaction. “You’ve been doing very well lately, you’ve even increased the Army of Judges by more than thousand soldiers. Today we have sixty-two applications for the conversion, which can be regarded as the biggest number within recent years.”

“Can you tell me how many members of the God’s Punishment Army we will need to overthrow the Devils?” Mayne asked, and after hesitating for a moment, he continued. “All the information I know about the Devils comes from the Holy Book. But the record in the book aren’t complete, within them, there isn’t any information about their origin, quantity or combat style recorded. I know that to know these secret I will have to wait until I become the next Pope, but...”

“You are too anxious, you have to show more patience,” O’Brian reminded him, “and it won’t be long before you can take over the title of Supreme Pontiff, becoming the next Pope. You will find all the answers to your questions in a secret library at the top of the Pantheon. For now, I can only tell you this, the more there are, the better it will be.” He sighed.

“Also, I’m not really looking forward to you presiding over the conversion ceremony, but since you’re already here, this session of the conversion, you will try to host it while I will be looking at it from the side. For later, this way you can also accumulate some... Keke... experience.”

Mayne promptly patted the Pope’s back and when his breathing had become slightly smoother, he then bowed and said: “As Your Holiness commands.”

Chapter 179 - Conversion Ritual

To become the next Pope, it was necessary to grasp all knowledge about the God's Punishment Army's Conversion Ceremony. A year ago, after O'Brian had declared that Mayne would be the one to become his successor, he had given him books about the ceremony to read. Only when he had obtained all the knowledge within would he have the qualifications to succeed him.

Because of this, the contents of the book have long since already been memorized.

To create a new soldier for the God's Punishment Army, it was necessary to sacrifice a witch's life. A mixture was made out of her blood and out of the God's Punishment Stones, which was then injected into a warrior of the Army of Judges. During the centuries the pattern of the ceremony had been improved many times, but the essence of it has never changed – while the number of witches decided the upper limit of the possible number of new member for the God's Punishment Army, it was the devotion and will of the Judges which decided its rate of success.

After reading this book, he finally came to understand why the Church would accommodate so many young women every year. There was no outward sign to indicated that they would turn into a witch, before the moment they started to gather their magic, they were completely the same as any other human. But once they began to converge into their magic power, their body, organs, and blood would all be changed. So, in addition to expanding the scale of the breeding, there was no other way they could raise the number of witches.

This was also the reason why he had approved of Heather's way of speaking – everything they had ever done was totally evil, the hands of the people within the higher ranks of the Church were all soaked in blood. They had killed more witches than any executioner. But in order to defeat the Devil, to avoid the destruction of humanity, they had no choice but to do so.

Only the victorious would be qualified to obtain God's favor.

...

There were two Judges placed on the conversion table, and Mayne knew both of them, namely it was Dylan from the first battalion and also Tucker Thor, a Holy City guard, who was still a Presiding Judge.

Even though both of them were smiling and trying to display their faith, but because of their tensed muscles and clenched fist, the Archbishop could still see just how nervous they truly were. So he tried to calm them by stepping up to them and patting their shoulders, "Relax, I believe both of you will succeed."

"Your Excellency, as long as we endure the pain, will we make it?" Dylan couldn't prevent himself from asking.

"That's right, you only have to hold on," Mayne laughed. "Your name is Dylan, right?"

“You remembered my name,” he became totally excited.

“Of course, you are a member of the First Battalion, which had participated in the war to defend Hermes last year. The captain of your unit is... Alecia, am I right?”

“Yes,” Dylan nodded over and over, “During the battle, our unit suffered heavy casualties, half of my comrades died under the claws of the demonic beasts. I thought that if I could get the ability to kill those mixed species like I’d seen the God’s Punishment Army do, Your Excellency, I would also want to become a member of the God’s Punishment Army!”

“That’s a firm belief,” Mayne encouraged, and then turned around to look at the other Judge. “So what’s about you, Tucker Thor, what is your reason for becoming a member of the God’s Punishment Army?”

“I want to defend the New Holy City,” said the Presiding Judge. “Furthermore, it seems that each passing year the demonic beasts only keep on growing stronger. They already broke through the wall of the Holy City last year, and if it weren’t for the God’s Punishment Army, it would have been entirely possible that they cathedral would have had fallen on that day. So now I also want to become a powerful shield against the demonic beasts, and pierce them with my pike.”

“Excellent, you are both the pride of the Church,” Mayne, just as it was described in the ancient records, tried to resolve their tension and fear through using encouraging words. When he saw that their faith was as strong as possible, he waved his hand to

signal that the ceremony could now continue.

A group of guards came up to blindfold their eyes and used iron rings to fix their ankles and hands to the top of the table, making it impossible for them to struggle free during the course of the Conversion Ceremony. Then the witch was also brought in and placed on the table between the two.

As a witch that belonged to the Church, she had spent most of her life in a monastery within the Old Holy City, but after her awakening, she was then sent over to the core area, waiting until it was time for her to become the material needed for the conversion.

One day before she was to be turned into a sacrifice, she was forced to drink a lot of dream water was. The dream water was an herbal medicine made from boiling sleeping ferns and winter flowers, it ensured that regardless of what happened she would not wake up during the ceremony.

“Number, age?”

“One, eighteen,” one of the guards replied.

This was just a routine inquiry, only the blood of an adult witch was strong enough to meet their requirements of conversion of Judges into a member of the God’s Punishment Army. After Mayne confirmed that the witch did indeed belong to the right roster he announced that the ceremony would now begin.

On his signal, a fine silver syringe was inserted into the witch's arm, and soon after her reddish-brown blood began to flow through the tube which was wrapped around the needle, and gather into a crystal basin. The bottom of the basin was covered by a layer of pale blue God's Stone of Retaliation, gradually becoming covered by the blood until it finally filled the whole basin.

The God's Stone of Retaliation soon gave birth to some changes. Through the side of the crystal basin they could see how the blue stones were being absorbed the witch's blood and about half an hour later the stones started to melt gradually until they had completely disappeared. The turbid blood now became clear, turning from a reddish-brown into sky a blue.

Even though this operation seemed to be quite simple, but only after tens of thousands of tests, were they finally able to come up with such a reliable procedure. For example, what was the best age, evaluating how much blood the witch contained, the right method for the needle and skin tube's production, from which part the blood should be taken and into which part should it be inserted, as well as what quality God's Stone of Retaliation would work for the best and what would be the right amount to use... In addition to using the ancient records, they also wrote down all of their own failed experiment and their thoughts on how they could make it better. But at the same time they were also explaining the general principle behind the conversion process.

After a witch's body was changed by their magic, their blood got the ability to strengthen the organs and tendons, but if the blood was used directly, it would only lead to the recipient dying instantly. Because of this, it was necessary to immerse a God's Stone of Retaliation within the witch's blood and dissolving the

“mysterious power” that was still within. After this it could now be injected into the aspirants – but, even with this, the blood would still damage receptionist’s consciousness, causing them to gradually lose their emotions and intelligence, ultimately turning them into beings which could only survive by using their instincts and a strong will. If they outlived the ceremony, the God’s Stone of Retaliation would give them the additional effect that even without wearing a God’s Stone of Retaliation, they would still be able to ban all magic around them.

He had to say, this was really a fascinating combination. The blood of a witch which would usually cause humans to die and the God’s Stone of Retaliation which, when swallowed would also put the people to death, when combined, their adverse effects would instead be reduced to a minimum.

When the blue liquid slowly flowed over their skin, and was absorbed by the two Judges, the veins in their arms and neck suddenly rose up, and their expression turned grim, as if they had to endure an enormous pain. Dylan was the first to shout out loudly, he struggled wildly on the table, clenching and opening his hands repeatedly, but he couldn’t move his hands or his feet, even though his body soon began to emit a layer of thin sweat.

Tucker, however, wasn’t in a much better condition either, he began growling and foam and blood could be seen at the edge of his mouth as his body twitched.

The fluid inside the crystal basin dropped little by little and soon the bottom became visible, by now Dylan’s voice had already turned into a sobbing, interrupted by shouts of words carrying an

unknown meaning. His skin began dissolving emitting a white smoke from his head to his toes. According to the judgement of the ancient records, this signs indicated that his conversion was on the brink of failure. Mayne hesitated, unsure over whether he should continue observing further, but at this moment the Pope stepped in behind him and placed a hand on his shoulder and said, "That's enough, let him go."

With these words, one of the Pope's personal guards came forward, drew a dagger and stabbed it smoothly and cleanly into Dylan's neck, quickly turning the handle and ending Dylan's suffering. .

After a painfully long wait, Tucker Thor's convulsions finally subsided, and his breathing gradually became smoother, and his former rosy skin turned a shade of light blue. Seeing this, Mayne knew that he had survived the conversion ceremony.

One man succeeded while another man had failed, seeing this result Mayne sighed, within a quarter of an hour the Church has lost a devoted Judge and also wasted half of the witch's blood.

But there were still sixty other Judges waiting for their chance at conversion, so he had to let the ceremony go on.

...

By the time the ceremony finally came to an end, Mayne was almost unable to stand. he staggered along the table, nearly throwing off the instruments that were lying on it, finally he sat

on the ground, with his back to the wall.

The Pope slowly came over until he was standing in front of him, “To tell you the truth, I’m surprised by your performance. The first time I presided over the ceremony, I did it much worse than you. At that year I was still Forty-five years old, but the strong smell of the blood made me throw up directly on the conversion table, almost wasting a whole pot of blood. The former Pope even gave me a ruthless beating, but the moment he was finished he had ordered me to go back on stage and continue to preside over the ceremony.”

“...” Hearing his tale, Mayne opened his mouth, but in the end, he didn’t really know what to say.

“So, if you do not want anything else, you may go back and have a good rest for today.”

“Yes, by your will.” The Archbishop took a deep breath, then went down on his knees and gave his salute, but he suddenly remembered the purpose of his visit today, “Hold on, today the reason you called me to the Mysterious Central Temple was because...”

“Oh, look at my memory,” O’Brien shook his head self-mockingly: “I was looking for you to give you a new poison, which was recently created within the core area.”

“Poison?” The core had devoted their energy into studying the God’s Stone of Retaliation, creating such things as cold pills,

fluorescent stones, wild chemical drug and so on. Afterwards all of their creation would be then sent to the Archbishop. But until now he had never heard that they had involved themselves in the production of poison, in Mayne opinion, that sort of thing should be done by the Alchemists who were good at it.

“According to them, its invention was entirely due to luck.” the Pope said unhurriedly. “It only becomes effective after it is sprinkled on rotten corpses and will have an effect on the surrounding population for a long time, compared to ordinary poisons it isn’t necessary for the target to ingest it orally. And without the special antidote, it is completely impossible for it to be cured. For the specific circumstances, you can inquire with Master Crow’s Eye. But, I thought that it might come in handy in the battle with the Four Kingdoms.

Hearing its description, Mayne immediately thought of the Broken Castle in the Wolfsheart Kingdom, and the unpleasant stalemate situation in the Kingdom of Graycastle. He suppressed his joy and saluted again: “If the poison is as effective as Master Crow’s Eye say’s it is, this should help me a lot.”

Chapter 180 - Population Statistics

Recently, Roland would always find himself in a cheerful mood.

Even while he was sitting alone in the office, he would occasionally be humming a ditty or two, immersed in the memories of his fantastic time inside the hot air balloon.

When Anna closed her eyes to kiss him, here appearance was just too cute. Every time he thought about it, he couldn't stop himself from smiling. Furthermore, the most important point had been the meaning behind her words, and how she showed them afterward with her passion and affection.

The only thing he could do was to respond even more passionately to her.

So strongly that when they landed Roland felt like there was a dull pain from his lips.

Probably, I had been kissing her too long, so that she became short of breath and used her teeth in panic?

In any case, I haven't experienced this kind of feelings in a long time.

When he came already near the end of his first quarter of life, those skills he'd learned from television dramas, and manhua finally came in handy, and the best part was that the object of his

affection was the beautiful and moving Miss Anna. Roland finally felt that he had taken his first step to becoming a winner in life.

He opened the drawer and grasped blindly around it, wanting to chew some snacks to calm his joy, yet the result was that he only felt empty air – I clearly put the beef jerky in yesterday, ah.

Roland looked back at Nightingale who stood by the window, seeing that the latter was blowing the whistle and pretended to only be casually watching the scenery outside. He had deliberately replaced the dried fish, trying to prevent Nightingale from stealing, but who could have thought that this also wouldn't stop her from taking the dried beef?

At this moment, the sound of footsteps could be heard coming from outside the door.

“Your Highness, Lord Barov requests to see you.”

“Let him in.”

Nightingale did not fade this time as she had always done before, she only pulled up her hood and took a place on the couch by the wall.

When the Assistant Minister opened the door and saw another person was also in the office he slightly raised his brow but soon resumed his normal appearance.

“Your Highness, this month’s demographic statistic has been completed.” Saying this he handed over a parchment to Roland.

“So fast?”

“With the Citizen Registration File, it has become much more convenient to count them,” the Assistant Minister explained laughingly. “Your previous decision to implement them was really wise.”

Oh, now you’ve turned into a bootlicker... Roland spread the scroll out in front of him; on it, Roland could see how many people inside of Border Town were engaged in which professions. They were sorted in categories so that one glance was enough to know all the relevant information. Compared with his previous reports, which hadn’t even been separated into paragraphs, Barov’s ability has progressed by a significant margin.

The first line contained the group with the largest population, the serfs. Currently, they included a total of 3628 people (including their family members). The line underneath it read, “Remarks: 1500 serfs are now engaged in farming.”

“Your Royal Highness, don’t you think that the number of farmers are too small?” Barov pointed to first line and said, “According to Sirius Daly, from the Ministry of Agriculture, if we want to achieve a state where Border Town doesn’t need to import food any longer, he fears that we will have to double the amount of the recently added farmland and manpower, only in this way will we be able to satisfy the amount of grain that Border Town needs.

Hearing this name, Roland recalled the impression he had of Sirius, he should be a former knight who belonged to the Wolf Family. The 1500 men who were now engaged in farming were the first serfs who were sent to Border Town, all the subsequent batches Roland had transferred to the mine or to Karl's construction team – but they also gotten the same assurance that as long as they worked hard enough, they would also be promoted to free people.

"I did not intend to produce enough grain to become self-sufficient by this year, and also, we currently have so much wheat stored in the castle warehouses, that it is enough to supply us for two or three months at least. And this year's harvest of the new species of wheat won't be the same as before."

"Not the same?" Barov got shocked by the unexpected revelation.

"When the moment comes, you will understand." Roland smiled. After all, they had planted Leaves' Golden Ones, the yield of each plant was at least three times higher than that of the old wheat plants. When it came time to harvest, it would surely serve as a shock. This was the reason why he didn't want to put too many people into the area of agriculture. With the crops being changed by Leaves magic, in the future they would only need a small number of farmers to feed most of Border Town's population. So with this in mind, as to save valuable human resources, he had placed a lot of the serfs into the industrial-development and the urban-construction fields.

Roland continued to look further down the list.

The second paragraph on the parchment was concerning the construction department, the following notes were divided into several groups, such like masons, bricklayer, mud craftsmen, carpenters, handyman and so forth. The total number that was engaged in this area was more than 1100 people, of which the vast majority were serfs who worked as handyman.

It was precisely because of these newly added people, that he was able to quickly build a batch of residential areas and factories – changing it to template buildings, mass production and routine process where all the important part needed to speed up the construction process. In Roland's eyes, this degree of improvement was still not enough, but for the locals, it was already a completely different world.

The third paragraph was about the mining staff.

Similar to the construction industry above, the amount of Border Town's local inhabitants were reduced to 25 people. They were mainly operating the steam engine, or were there to handle the registration of the ore and supervise the work. The remaining 1600 people were outsiders, it included mercenaries captured during the battle against Longsong Stronghold and all of the serfs sent in the rear.

“Recently there have been a few brawls in the mine,” Barov said, “mainly between the mercenaries and serfs, this is a concealed source of danger, Your Royal Highness. They are too many, once they start to make trouble, the twenty-five managers won't be able to control them. I suggest that the First Army becomes responsible

for guarding them.”

“Well ...” Roland thought about it for a moment, “Alright, do it. For now, we don’t have enough manpower to set up a police force. I will speak with Iron Axe soon, fifty men from the firearms team should be sufficient.”

“What is a police...?”

“You can think of it as a kind of patroller, but the scope of their area is much larger. Basically, all the internal security will be done by them.”

During this era there was no separation between the inner and external force, because of this, they would permit the army to administer law and order. Furthermore, it was unlikely that it would turn into their own dark history. He had no intention of diverting his manpower to form a secondary force, considering he had his own huge enemy, the Church to look out for.

The fourth paragraph contained information about Border Town’s First Army.

After the end of the war against Longsong Stronghold, the achievements of the First Army sounded through the whole of the Western Territories, making them famous – three hundred people while only paying a minuscule price had overcome the 1500 man strong force of the Duke. Completely destroying any thought of resistance within the nobility of Longsong Stronghold.

After evaluating their merits and bestowing them with their rewards, Roland had doubled the size of the First Army, increasing it to the size of 600 people. Soon after the recruitment order was made public, the whole town's square became packed with enthusiastically people who wanted to sign up. Roland still followed his old concept to select the member of the First Army. He chose the three hundred indigenous people, who had the best physical condition, and did not have a criminal record and let them join the First Army.

The rest was a summary of all kinds of technical personnel.

For example, the smelting and firing industry had substantially increased in the past month, from the initial no more than 20 people, they had risen to about 400 people. Thanks to the furnaces granted by the “furnace expert” Lesya, the North Slope Furnace Group could not only produce red brick but they could also fire cement and glass. At the same time, they had also erected three shaft furnaces. They were used to smelt the ore which had already pilled up n the yard. The produced ingots could afterward also be transported to the required areas.

As for education, chemistry, industry, animal husbandry, the people engaged within amounted to less than 50, so from a demographic point of view, Border Town still had a long way to go. But the fact that the original population of hunters and miners in Border Town could be changed into this within merely half a year, could be regarded as earth-shaking.

Today, the occupation of hunters had basically disappeared, from hunting for surviving it was now changed into a hobby. Excluding

those people who became members of the First Army or joined the smelting industry, the current Border Town still had nearly a thousand individuals who were unemployed. While waiting for the literacy phase of the universal education finished. Roland decided to pull all of these people into the factory, and open up the prelude to the industrial era.

Chapter 181 - Soraya's Paintings

After Barov left, Roland went to the drawer and put the statistics into it. Looking back at Nightingale, he wanted to ask her what had happened with her but after hesitating for a moment, he ultimately wasn't able to.

He already had a vague answer within his heart, but saying something like that was too embarrassing, and even if he guessed wrong it might even be even more embarrassing. So in the end, Roland swallowed his question and said instead: "Now with this done, let's go to the North Slope Mine."

"Do you want to go and see what changes Soraya's new ability could make?" Although Nightingales behavior has become somewhat strange, her attitude was still the same as before, with a smile, she took off her hood and said, "Let's go."

Perhaps I'm just thinking too much into this, Roland thought, as he looked at the witch who quickly came to his side.

The ride on the hot air balloon on the other day had influenced far more than only one or two people.

He never imagined that Soraya would become the second witch who gave birth to a fundamental change of her ability.

In fact, even she wasn't aware of the change.

Roland had only been present by chance when her talent appeared.

Since the hot air balloon was a gift for Anna, it had been placed in the castle courtyard. Whenever someone wanted to see the landscape from high up, they had to call for Anna and Lightning. But the day before when it began to rain, Roland suddenly remembered that the out of rattan weaved basket would become soft when immersed in water, and even if it later got dried it would still lose its toughness, thinking of this he wanted to take it back into the castle.

He had intended to let the servants do it but he then had second thoughts about doing so, whatever the outcome, the hot air balloon was his present to Anna, and the ropes and airbag were parts that could also be easily damaged, so he decided to personally bring it back to the castle. After he had called Hummingbird over and came to the vestibule, he got surprised by what he saw.

The whole basket had a pattern painted on it – it was covered by a bird's-eye view of the scenery of Border Town. But unlike her previous photo-like paintings, her paintings unexpectedly looked like they would immediately stand up and come to life. And it also seems that the raindrops here couldn't fall on Roland either. When he took a closer look, he discovered that her paintings had for the first time gotten a "thickness" to it.

It wasn't strange that a picture had thickness. Theoretically, every real picture should have had a thickness – because the pigment itself had a thickness. In paintings, this thickness could even be put to use. By using brushes, strokes or scrapers it was

possible to create rough textures, and through a variation of layers the realism itself could be increased, enhancing the expressive power of the painting.

But Soraya's paintings were different, her paintings weren't drawn with a brush and paint, but directly by using her magic.

Therefore, that she was able to create this thickness by shaping her magic was especially surprising.

He remembered that when he had softly touched those sticking out woods with his hands, it had really felt like he was scratching over branches and green leaves, it wasn't the case that they were hard and solid, but rather soft like gum. And when he touched the ground, the tactile sensation was very robust, as if he had actually touched a stone.

Simply amazing.

As well as that those raindrops flowing down along the drawn landscape were unable to soak the slightest bit into the rattan.

Back in the castle, he immediately called for Soraya to come over, and then Nightingale also confirmed this point. When she observed Soraya from within her fog, the magic in Soraya's body also wasn't the same as before. Previously it was a golden whirlpool, but now it had condensed into a rotating... ribbon.

...

When they stepped into the military factoring compound, Anna approached and welcomed them laughingly, while giving Roland a big hug.

Since they had deepened their relationship, the intimacy she showed him had become significantly more. Roland rubbed her head in a good mood, and the silver clip stuck to her hair flashed within the sunlight.

But in the corner of the eye, initially Soraya had also intended to come over to greet him, but now she stood at her original place not knowing what to do, in the end, she began to blush and turned away, putting on an, I see nothing appearance.

“Cough,” Nightingale took Soraya’s hand and pulled her to the table, and asked deliberately, “Did you draw this?”

Roland smiled and shook his head, letting go of Anna and went over with her.

Only seeing that the whole table was covered with the demanded pictures, the paintings were exactly what you could see in the yard, the only difference between the paintings were the thickness, some of them were only about a millimeter higher than the paper, while some came close to three centimeters – this was exactly the training concept Roland had arranged for her this morning, testing how far it was possible for her to thicken her magic “paint”.

“Is this the thickest one?” Roland touched with his fingers a

nearly three centimeters thick picture. The enchanted blue sky, that part of the picture was soft as if it has no texture in general, but when he slid his finger down to the yard's wall, he immediately felt a sand-like friction.

It seemed to be exactly as he had expected, after the evolution of her magic pen, the pictures drawn by her were not only in line with the shape and color of the original, even the tactile sensation came close to the original object.

“It can also become thicker, but increasing the thickness, even more, the magical consumption becomes very large,” Soraya pointed at a brown protrusion on the table, “I wanted to draw the tree trunk outside of the wall, but I had barely drawn the basics of the tree trunk before I had already spent half of my magic power.

“This is your painting?” Roland reached with his hand for a ten centimeters thick painting, “I thought it was really a bark.”

That being said, however, its connection to the table was exceptional firm, the Prince used his hand to grab the tree bark and tried to pick it up until his two feet had left the ground, but even with this he was unable to separate the bark from the tree.

Seeing this, Nightingale drew a knife, yet even after a long time she was still only able to cut a small hole at the bottom. “This thing seems to have been embedded into the table.”

In the end, it could only be cut by Anna, she changed her black fire into a thin thread and swept it over the table. Afterward, the

pigments began to emit white smoke and then it dropped off. The cut was smooth but not glossy. Instead it had several black scorched marks on it. Roland picked the fallen pigments up, and when he held it in his hand he discovered that it was far lighter than he had imagined.

“Why did you suddenly want to change your style... No, I mean, how do you decide to add thickness to your painting?” Roland asked.

“I think it was probably because I had seen this kind of scenery for the first time,” Soraya stated her memories. “When I was high up in the air and looking down on the earth, I felt, that the paintings I had made before – which you had said to be almost comparable to the real scene and had called a “photo”, was in fact not accurate. Especially when I used the basket to portray the scenery, and also when I had come down I thought even more in this way.”

She paused, then continued slowly, “The tops of the trees are pointed, and the wind always blows through them carefreely. The mountains are high and low, resembling the ups and downs of a chest. And the river is embedded in the earth, the ships on top of it are pushing their way through. This was the scenery I had seen and not the extremely thin painting.

So I had wanted that my picture would become more like reality. I wanted it to stand up, just like this magnificent scenery. But even after several tries I failed to succeed... during a moment of frustration, I suddenly remembered what you had said about those balls.”

“Balls?” Rolland raised his eyebrows questionably.

“Well,” she nodded shyly, “that was at least what you had taught us. I thought that everything was made out of those small balls, then shouldn’t the pattern I drew also be the same? I made a few more attempts and imagined that the pattern illustrated by my magic pen were made out of colorful balls, all stacked to each other, and together formed a whole block of color. Then... the screen suddenly wriggled up, the green woods grew upwards, the dark blue river sunk, finally turning into the pattern you normally see. At that time, these changes shocked both Anna and me. If you hadn’t mentioned it, I would never have realized that my magic had evolved.”

“So, it was like this.”

“But compared to Anna’s black fire, with the exception that after the evolution my paintings seems to be more vivid, it seems it doesn’t have any other useful effect.” Soraya spat out.

“No ... why?” Roland shook his head. “In my eyes, they are not just simple paintings.”

It would be a waste if she only used this ability for painting. He remembered the scene where the rain had slid over the surface of the basket but was still unable to immerse into one of the scenes – rather than a painting it was a kind of “coating” magic.

Chapter 182 - Shaft Furnaces

As long as the object's surface was covered and formed a definite contiguous skin, it could be called a coating. The coating itself could be gaseous, liquid or solid, with all sorts of different applications to them. From the initial beautiful decoration, and later enforcing the durability of the object, all of these things could be considered as coatings.

Afterward, Roland launched a series of tests at the substances.

He became extremely pleased by the test results, its concept could be roughly summarized with the phrase: "The more energy her paintings consumed, and the longer she drew, the better they would become." Her previous pictures were already hard to completely erase, as long as their medium wasn't also destroyed, and now, after her ability had evolved, this characteristic would become even stronger in the future.

Firstly, there was the high adhesive force and the light mass of these "pigments". While on top, they showed some of the physical characteristics of the object – it could also change its flexibility according to the depicted object. Things such as painted clouds or skies, would be as soft as cotton candy, while still having a high resistance towards stretching and cutting. But when replaced with something made out of iron ingot, glass or material of a similar nature, it then became hard and brittle, and could be directly smashed with a hammer. In other words, due to its limited mass, its performance regarding flexibility was far superior to its display of rigidity, which was consistent with Soraya's understanding of how the pigments worked.

Secondly, regardless of which characteristics were shown, its chemical properties remained very stable. Not only didn't it react with dilute sulfuric acid or dilute nitric acid, but it also repelled water and oil.

When Roland filled a coated paper box with water, the thin bottom of the box didn't show any marks of any water seepage. After pouring water into it, the clear liquid beads rolled in the box like dew on a lotus leaf. And when he touched the bottom with his finger he confirmed that even then it still remained dry.

For the high temperature resistance test, Anna went to the paper box and dropped some molten iron into it, the paper as supporter caught fire immediately, the coating itself however, except for stretching a bit didn't change much. Only when Anna used her black flame to directly burn the coating, did it begin to deform and melt, emitting a white smoke until it finally turned into a mass of black jelly.

The fact that the coating also had an insulating effect totally excited Roland. After all, coated copper wires could be used the same way as enameled wire, which he had already proven by building a simple DC motor in the yard.

At this point, Roland had completely understood the capacity of Soraya's new ability.

Unlike Anna's black flame which was entirely different from her previous green fire, Soraya's new ability was more like an

evolution of her previous painting skill. She could now draw a realistic “oil painting”, or she can also just draw her “photo” like the pictures from before. Her abilities could also be used in parallel, it only depended on what she had in mind to make.

Also when she drew a picture and if the thickness of the coating was kept under one centimeter, Soraya could draw several hours without needing to stop. But when she drew with a thickness of at least three centimeters, her magic consumption would also rapidly increase , and at a depth of ten centimeters, she hit a threshold, almost immediately exhausting her magic with only one or two strokes. Of course, from another perspective, this was also the most efficient way in which to counter the demonic bite.

Also, after the evolution, her magic still belonged to the category of summoning, and as long as it came within the suppressive range of a God’s Stone of Retaliation, her magical pen would also suddenly disappear, making it impossible for Soraya to draw a new pattern. However, the already drawn coating wasn’t affected by a God’s Stone of Retaliation. Under Nightingales observation, they had discovered that when Soraya’s paintings were drawn, they no longer contained any trace of magic to them – in other words, the material created by her magic pen became a real existence.

As for how to use the coating... there were too many possibilities. Soraya herself had never imagined how much of a change her new ability would bring to the town. For Roland, her new ability meant that he could quickly get some coated water pipes which were totally rust-proof, and large bundles of enameled wire, even bricks would become usable at high temperature. He suddenly saw the light, for his original seemingly three out of reach engineering projects (tap-water system, electricity, and access to roads).

At the same time, this also reminded him of the point made that: Personal experience was far more profound than reading axioms from books.

If he could get the witches to see the world in its sub-atomic state, and get them to accept the particle theory, would it lead to a new round of evolutions? Such as... letting them even observe micro-organism under a microscope.

Roland felt that it was necessary to try it at least try it.

North Slope, the furnace area.

“Blow! Let the fire burn even hotter!” Lesya shouted.

Although it was impossible to directly see the scene inside of the shaft furnace, with the three carts full of charcoal, the stones should already have turned red from the heat by now.

When he was invited to the town by a letter from van Bate, he thought that the town was only a desolate and barren land, and if it hadn't been written that he could start a new life here as a mason, he would never have run to the kingdom's border to resume his old trade.

By temporarily leaving his family behind and taking only his own

luggage, he had already prepared himself for a life lived inside of tents while only have porridge to eat. Having nobody in charge and also not getting any payment, were problems often encountered within the construction business.

Lesya hadn't intended to stay for a very long time inside Border Town, as long as he could see Karl, his longtime friend, and see how he was faring with his life here in exile, he would be satisfied.

But reality was always different than you expected.

When he had reached Border Town by boat, he saw that Karl was already waiting for him at the dock. Previously, van Bate had been a distinguished mason in King's City and was even a powerful contender for becoming the next leader of the guild. When he compared him with his former appearance, Lesya saw that his temples had turned white and his face had a few more wrinkles to it, but his body wasn't thin. Instead he was very sturdy, his face even burned full of spirit.

After they had exchanged their greeting, Karl didn't take him to a noisy and messy site, but unexpectedly led him to an apparently new residential building. Where he handed him his keys with the words: "This house is yours. Put your luggage away first and then we can go to the pub and have a drink."

... And then in the pub, out of Karl's mouth Lesya heard a series of incredible stories.

Karl, with his status as a civilian was recruited by Lord into

working at the city hall, not only becoming an official with a fixed monthly salary, but also the construction-sector executive!

“If you stay, you will also receive the possibility of entering the city hall!”

“Provided with free housing!”

“After ten years of work, you also get a retirement allowance! Are you asking yourself what the benefit of a retirement allowance is? It means that you will get money without even having to work!”

Lesya had thought that Karl was just drunk and speaking nonsense, so the results afterwards weren't as he had expected... Karl was speaking the truth.

“Open the slag discharge port, clear the slag!”

After the work was done, none of the problems envisioned by Lesya had appeared. On top of that, not only did they immediately get their money from the Lord, but the Lord also reacted exceptionally fast. Whenever they had a request, they would always get their answer on the following day. Plus, this was also the place they produced an alchemical product called cement, with it, he could easily bond bricks, allowing the construction process to advance by leaps and bounds, here, he could experienced a kind of unprecedented carefree feeling, like never before.

Just within a month, Lesya had already built five blast furnaces,

and three additional shaft furnaces for iron smelting.

The shaft furnace was the result of his hard thinking during the years after the disbandment of the mason guild. It was the product made using all of his gathered experience, he had already thought that he could only pass it on as a blueprint, never would he have dared to believe that he would one day see it erected before his very eyes.

The modified shaft furnace was nearly two meters high and had an internal diameter of about 75 cm. The lower parts of the furnace's body was provided with a number of air nozzles, which could be used for drawing in air by using bellows and ventilation, leaving the bottom for the slag discharging port and the leaving port for the molten iron. Next to the shaft furnace, they had erected a ramp made out of sand and gravel, making it convenient for them to feed, and also to observe the situation within the furnace.

Today was the first day where the shaft furnace would be put into use. According to the usual practice, before it was officially opened, it had to undergo a smelting test.

During the trial they had intermittently opened the slag discharging port more than ten times, and had also added new charcoal two times, coming to the conclusion that the furnace had passed its inspection – the molten iron was now flowing into its sink.

The slag mouth opened smoothly, and the temperature had met the high temperature needed for smelting iron, so there was no

need to continue wasting charcoal. After all, to reduce loss, during the furnace test they had used the waste ore they had collected in the corner of the yard.

After opening the iron discharging port and letting the molten flow out, Lesya announced the furnace shutdown.

...

Two days later, when the furnace chamber was cleaned up by townsfolk they also excavated several pieces of dark stone. Under the high-temperature baking, the other wastes had been discharged several times, only these pieces of ore were left, after they were thrown in they almost hadn't changed at all, only their surface had become more bright, just like black ink.

Lesya could also not determine what this black ore was, he only knew that it was a waste product of the mining process. Yet its shape and appearance were really pleasing to the eye, not resembling anything useless. But if it was useful and they were unable to melt it, how should they create artifacts from it? Unable to come to a conclusion of his own, he straightforward picked out a block of the most preserved ore, covered it with a cloth and sent a man to the castle to give it to Roland Wimbledon, the Lord of Border Town.

Perhaps the well taught Lord will know the answer.

Chapter 183 - The Township Construction Plan

“What is this?” Nightingale asked while looking at the black, shiny stone on the table.

“Obsidian.” Roland didn’t even raise his head a bit, entirely busy concentrating on drawing the blueprint.

“Ob... what kind of stone?”

“No, I was just speaking nonsense.” He sighed, slightly looking upwards at the shape and color of the stone, only the ghosts will know what this is, ah. After all, he wasn’t a geological engineer, even if he had a pure metal right in front of him, it still wasn’t guaranteed that he could distinguish it, even less by what the ore looked like.

The knowledge he had in his head only told him that most of the ores were a complex composition of compounds; different impurities gave them different colors. For example iron ore could be composed out of: hematite, pyrite, and siderite, which when looking only at by using their outer appearance, seemed to be thousands of miles apart.

Especially pyrite, which would sometimes show a light yellow metallic luster, leading to the situation where it is often identified as gold, giving it the nickname, fool’s gold.

As for their heat-resistant... the compounds themselves didn't have a fixed melting point, this was related to its impurities and its ingredients, so by using temperature alone, it still wasn't possible to distinguish between all the different varieties. Furthermore, even if the metal elements existed in their ion state, as long as he didn't know its purification method, the smelting would be useless.

"There actually exists something you do not know about?" Nightingale asked in astonishment.

"There are a lot of such things," Roland put down his quill and made himself a cup of black tea, "do you want to drink something?"

"No," she waved her hand to decline. "Ah! That's right, beef jerky isn't as delicious as salted fish, it would be better if you put some salted fish into the drawer later."

"..." For a moment Roland was silent, then he decided it would be for the best if he pretended not to have heard her.

Regarding the stone, he intended to give it to Kyle Sichi and let him deal with it. After all, minerals were radioactive to some extent, so placing them in his office just so they could serve as decoration wasn't a very good choice.

Recently, after Soraya's ability had evolved, he had suddenly discovered that there were a lot of new things he could now create.

The first of which would be a tap water system, which would greatly enhance the standard of living for the residents. Just thinking about what it would be like if he was one of the residents, who came home covered in sweat after a busy day: but when they wanted to clean their sticky bodies and they happen to discover that the water tank was empty which meant they would have to go to the next well to fetch some water, this kind of feeling had to be bad.

Moreover, Roland was very tired of the process of always having to get a jar of water when he wanted to wash his face or wash his hands. In addition, he always got the feeling that there would be some parasites growing within the water after a few days spent inside the tank; not to mention that water tank was rarely ever cleaned, even once each month. And when he took a closer look at the water tank, there is sediment at the bottom, and he could also see some caterpillar-like creatures flowing.

In case they used a water tower for their water supply, there would be no additional technical difficulties. They could just use a steam engine to pump the water from Redwater River directly into the water tower, and from there, they could rely on the siphon principle to let the water flow through the pipelines and into each house. With this, they would have formed an infrastructure for an automatic water supply system. The reason why Roland hadn't put it into practice until now was because... of the missing materials.

If they used water supply pipes made out of iron or copper, which didn't have any anti-rust treatment, the pipes would be turned into scrap iron within a few years. Brass pipes were perfect for water supply pipes, they were corrosion-resistant, and their internal walls wouldn't also become encrusted, were non-toxic,

and with their copper ions, they would also be sterile. But from which area should he take the money to produce these pipes? The output of the North Slope Mine was far from being sufficient to be used for luxury products. Even within later generations, high-grade copper water pipes were still considered as products only used within high-end residential areas.

At present, Border Town was not only unable to export ore. They were even reliant on external sources to satisfy their demand. So, whether it were iron pipes or copper pipes, Roland was very reluctant to use them for something which didn't give much benefit but was purely for his own enjoyment from getting a water supply system.

But now it was different, with Soraya's coating magic he could make the piping out of thin air. With her magic, they could easily manufacture water pipes, for example by taking an iron pipe as a mold, wrapping it in paper and then have Soraya cover it in her coating. Afterward, they only had to take out the mold and they would get their pipe. Even if these kind of water pipes didn't turn out to be pressure-resistant, it would be sufficient as long as the water pipes were placed in a covered ditch.

Second, would be the creation of a power supply system... He was afraid that there was no way to spread it over the whole town within a short time, but to let the castle shine in full light had always been something that Roland had wanted to achieve. Having to read books using the weak lighting of a candle wasn't only too painful for the eyes, it also caused them great harm. Furthermore, the summer was coming up soon with its hot temperatures even during the nights. If they then also had to put on candles and torches, what kind of atmosphere would it then be?

Nowadays, with generators and wires, the road wasn't too far before the castle could enter the electrical age ahead of its time. As for the filaments for the lamps... Roland vaguely remembered that the usage of tungsten-wire carbonized-bamboo filaments were commonly used to produce incandescent. And bamboo wasn't a rarity, in the forest south of the Redwater River there were a lot to be found.

However, what Border Town currently needed most were smelting facilities. The quantity of their iron production was directly related to the scale of their mechanical production and weapons manufacturing, which were both needed for the survival of the town.

"Are you painting a... tower?" Nightingale sat at the table and asked curiously.

"Almost," Roland nodded, "but its inside is empty and it can be filled with fuel and ore. It has the same function as a shaft furnace and can be used to smelt iron ore into pig iron."

This was upgraded version of the ancient blast furnace, a vertical shaft furnace.

To learn about Lesya's plan for a shaft furnace Roland had visited the construction site and had taken a look, to tell the truth, with the exception that its capacity was too small, and the temperature it could reach was too low, its structure had been very close to a blast furnace, and if Soraya hadn't evolved her magic, giving the

town the possibility to produce fire bricks, Roland had intended to build a dozen of such shaft furnaces.

But now, where they had refractory brick, they naturally should consider a furnace which could reach a higher temperature, and had a higher output than the blast furnace.

The height of the new shaft furnace was nearly eight meters, enough to have as much as four times the capacity than the old shaft furnace. The furnace was tower shaped, and its largest part was three meters wide. In order to prevent the tower from collapsing, he had installed some brackets at the bottom. The furnace walls were relatively thin, with a thickness of half a meter and the innermost layer would be made out of Soraya's heat-resistant firebricks. At the same time, it also had a ventilation hole through which a steam engine would continually provide fresh air.

In order to make full use of the power of the steam engine, Roland had also designed a set of automatic feeding equipment for the blast furnace, which included a climbing rail and a movable door at the bottom of a unique material cart.

With the help of a steam engine the cart would climb to the top of the furnace, there the buckle at the bottom of the car would insert itself into a hook, pulling open the pouring mouth and dumping the fuel or ore into the furnace. For this era, this system could be regarded as the best possible method.

Unlike the old shaft furnaces with their large openings and low heat, his new furnace, once it started production wouldn't stop for a long time. Though they would have to continuously feed it with

fuel and ore, its output would be much higher than that of Lesya's shaft furnace. As long as they construct five or six of these furnaces, the town's pig iron production would be multiplied.

...

When Roland finished drawing all the blueprints, he rubbed his sore wrists and then took a box out of ones of the table's drawers and pushed it to in front of Nightingale.

The startled Nightingale didn't know what to expect, "This is..."

"Ah... I had intended to give it to you at an early time, but engraving the pattern took some time, after all, I'm also not extremely skilled with the machines in the factory," Roland smiled, "You should open it and take a look."

On his words, she stretched out her hand to open the box, and was unable to suppress a gasp of surprise.

Looking inside, she saw two revolvers which were completely different from the prototypes used by Carter. The two pistols were made out of shiny silver and polished so much that she could see her own reflection within. Furthermore, its body and grip were engraved with delicate patterns, on top of the barrels, he had even engraved Nightingales name: "dedicated to Veronica."

This idea had already been in Roland's mind for a long time. Compared to carrying around those inconvenient flintlocks from

before, the newly developed revolver was quite perfect for her. Whether it was their security or their firing rate, it was all of a high level. And now, after giving such powerful weapons to the hands of an agility type like Nightingale, Roland was already looking forward to the results.

“Thank you,” with a big smile on her face she picked up the two pistols, jumped off the table, and directly stepped into the shooting position. “Will you teach me how to use them?”

“Of course,” Roland nodded, seeing Nightingale in her white assassin outfit coupled with a gorgeous and dazzling smile, made him instantly understand what it meant to be handsome to the point of having no friends, “Using them isn’t difficult, as long as you are able to sneak at the target side, you only have to pull the trigger and shout : ‘it’s high noon’.”

Chapter 184 - Self

Scroll stood in front of the door, outside of the bedroom, unsure of whether she should enter, however she decided to push the door open and step into the room.

Within the room, she saw Wendy sitting at the table looking miserable while holding a book in her hands. Scroll didn't even need to take a look, she could already guess that it was certainly "The basic theory of natural science".

Scroll couldn't stop herself from chuckling out loud, she had rarely seen Wendy ever display such an expression. Even when they were trapped in the Impassable Mountain Range with the Witch Cooperation Association and the shortage of goods had already reached a critical level, she had still always shown a smile, trying to cheer up every sister, seemingly never worrying about the hardships they had to endure.

I had never expected it would be a book that would trouble her so much.

"I'm unable to understand it at all, is what you think right?" Scroll said, "It was the same for me when I read the book for the first time."

"I thought you were Nightingale," Wendy, who had heard her chuckled and turned her head. "...and now?"

"It's still impossible for me to understand it."

“Fortunately, you and I are alike.” Wendy sighed, “Anna would never say that. And I would never have expected that it would be Soraya who would be the second to connect everything and evolve her ability. I feel that if I’m not working hard enough, I will soon be surpassed by the younger generation. I do not understand how His Royal Highness knows so much and that what he says about the invisible world is actually the truth.

“In fact, there are numerous things he isn’t aware of,” Scroll shrugged. “I’m referring to certain aspects.”

“Such as?”

“It’s the matter with Nightingale,” Scroll said, taking a stool for herself and then sitting next to Wendy. “Don’t you also find that her current behavior is very different from how she acted in the past? Previously she had always concealed her body when she was protecting His Highness, even if she merely went out she would still put on her hood, but... she is now even listening earnestly during the evening lectures. You, who are living with her in the same room, should be even more aware of this than I am, maybe you can tell me what had happened to her in the end?”

“Nothing,” Wendy shook her head. “She had just finally made her choice.”

Seeing Wendy’s disregarding attitude surprised Scroll, “Her choice?”

“Well, it is just as you have guessed,” Wendy closed the book and bluntly said, “Without a doubt she had developed feelings towards His Highness Roland Wimbledon, which can clearly be seen without having to guess. If they shelter one of us, it is only a matter of time before they win the heart of the witch, during the journey with the Witch Cooperation Association, it wasn’t uncommon to hear rumors about things like this.”

“Those were just stories made up by others, most of the sisters did not fare well in those circumstances.”

“His Highness is not the same as the people in the stories.”

Scroll got startled, she did not expect to hear this coming from Wendy, who had held the same view as herself until recently, “You know, us witches are unable to have children, the Prince cannot...”

“The Prince will take a witch for his wife,” Wendy didn’t even let her finish speaking, “He even told you so personally.”

How can it be that she knows about it... was Nightingale present at that time? Then she suddenly understood what the other wanted to say her, “Wendy do you blame me for not telling this to you? I just didn’t want to let this matter leak out. This could bring unnecessary problems on His Highness’ road to the throne.”

“...” Wendy remained silent for a while and then said, “I know, and I’m not blaming you because it is exactly the same thing I previously said to Nightingale. Before I knew His Highness’ answer, I thought it would end well if it were to happen to one of

our sisters, but since the Prince does not mind it, do we really have to try to change their minds? Previously, when Nightingale suppressed her feelings, she always seemed to be depressed. I prefer how she looks now, no matter what the outcome will be, at least she followed the feeling of her heart.

So that's the reason, Scroll thought. Although she agreed to not abandon the practice of not letting the news spread, she still doesn't want to stop the development of the feelings of her sisters. Unexpectedly there is a difference between Cara who never allowed someone to do something on their own wanting to be the only one who decided how to deal with their problems. Where Wendy instead is always looking at it from the perspective of her sisters, even trying to cheer them up during their times of hardship.

"But is His Highness aware of this point?" Scroll suddenly thought of a serious problem, "What if his decision is based on not knowing about the witch's inability to give birth?"

"Oh..." Wendy voice also turned depressed, "How about, you go and ask him?"

West of the town, outside the city walls.

 Closer to summer now, the sun shone brightly on the grassland. In the near distance, flocks of cattle and sheep leisurely eating grass could be seen. It was hard to imagine that only three months ago, the whole landscape had been covered in snow and that there

had been nothing outside except for terrorizing demonic beasts.

The shooting training had already lasted for most of the afternoon, Nightingale was able to master the shooting skill even faster than Roland had expected, much faster. Everyone's talent is probably just differently, he thought, some people are just born to fight. By now, her loading, aiming, and firing positions has become completely unlike that of a novice.

"If she had been born in a knighthood, she would be one of the top stars of the Knights in the Kingdom of Graycastle," Carter couldn't help but praise her, "Just like me."

"Luckily she wasn't, I do not want her arms to be as thick as yours," Roland glanced at him, "how was the feeling, being able to achieve a draw with an extraordinary witch?"

"When I got hit, I thought that I had been hit by siege hammer, my whole chest got shattered," Carter said honestly. "To tell the truth, it felt terrible."

"Luckily, there should not be a next time," Roland laughed.

Waiting until another round of still-standing shooting was finished, the Prince applauded Nightingale and called her over, "So far you're performed splendidly, because of that, let now do a simulation training."

After putting her pistols into the belt, Nightingale walked

towards the Prince and a sweat droplet on the tip of her nose sparkled in the bright sunshine.

“Do you see those targets?” Roland pointed to the five targets not far away, standing at bust height, “They are hanging above some God’s Punishments Stones, so you should be able to see their position very clearly from within your fog. Within the test you should combine your skills and your guns, knocking down those enemies, all while exposing yourself only for the shortest time possible.”

Within the fog, the objects and space were changing constantly, making it difficult to ensure that the bullets would fly towards their target. Previously, when she had tried shooting directly from inside the fog, the results were that out of ten rounds of bullets, nine changed their line of flight after leaving the fog. They changed their trajectory so much that Roland, who was standing behind Nightingale, was nearly hit.

Therefore, whenever she shot, Nightingale had to step out of the fog, and the shorter amount of time she exposed herself, the more difficult it would become for the enemy to counterattack.

“Understood,” she smiled, raised her cloak with one hand, and disappeared into thin air before the two of them.

When the first shot of the revolver could be heard, Roland only saw a white figure quietly emerge and then, with an eruption of a flame and gas, the target got hit and broke apart. Even before the broken wooden parts had completely landed, Nightingale had already arrived behind the second target, pulling the trigger from a

distance of three to four meters from it.

And then, the third, the fourth... for every shot, she had never completely stepped out of the fog, in addition to her silver pistol and a spark of fire, Roland couldn't make out any other details. It was already difficult just to catch her position with his eyes. When Nightingale moved forward within her fog, it was just like those scenes he had seen in movies in the past. Within the blink of an eye, all five targets had been destroyed, and after another blink, Nightingale once more stood at his side.

"How was it?" Nightingale laughingly asked.

"Uhh..." Roland looked at the stunned Carter and asked, "What do you think?"

"I'm afraid no one can catch Miss Nightingale," Chief Knight took a deep breath, "Even if they put on a God's Stone of Retaliation, they still wouldn't be safe."

"So, did I graduate?" She wiped the sweat from her nose and rubbed it on to Roland's body.

"Of... course."

Chapter 185 - The Star Of The Theater (Part 1)

‘The Swan’ followed the Redwater River on its course westwards. May was standing on its bow, her eyes looking straight ahead. She wasn’t standing here to enjoy the scenery, she just wanted to finally be able to see Border Town’s pier.

“How much longer will it take us to reach our destination?” She asked impatiently.

“We will be there soon, Miss May, the sun is shining on you again, it might still be better if you went back to the cabin to rest,” Ghent, who was standing directly behind her said. She didn’t have to look back to know, that at this moment he would have a pleasant smile across his entire face.

And as she then turned around, she discovered that she had been right, “That is exactly what you’ve told me before, how can it still be soon? In the end, have you really ever been to Border Town before?”

“Uh ...” for a long time he only mumbled something unknown, then he scratched his head and embarrassingly said, “The last time I was there, was already ten years ago.”

“One year is already long enough to change the Lord of Longsong Stronghold, so what do you think could have happened in a decade?” May asked annoyed, “But there are always exceptions. I only have to look at you, no matter if it was ten years ago or

yesterday, from the beginning to the end you've never stood on stage even once."

Seeing that she had finally swept the smile from her counterpart's face, she was finally able to find some comfort in her heart. If it hadn't been for Irene's message, she really would never have ever wanted to go with this group of fellow performers to perform at Border Town.

As the female star of the theater in Longsong Stronghold, she was quite famous throughout the Western Territory. She had even received an invitation from the owner of the Tower Theater, to come to King's City and perform in "Prince seeking for Love". The show had been a great success, and even the master of drama, Mister Kadin Faso, admired how she had played her role in the Prince seeking for Love. Although she hadn't played the heroine, she had still left an impression that wasn't any less impressive than that of the female lead.

But when she had excitedly come back to the Longsong Stronghold, she had discovered that the stronghold had undergone enormous changes. Duke Ryan had been defeated, and the territory had fallen into the hands of the 4th Prince, Roland Wimbledon, who had handed over the task of governance to Petrov Hill of the Honeysuckle Family... she had left the West for less than a year, but within that short period of time it had become entirely unfamiliar to her.

Fortunately, the turmoil in the political upper ranks only had a small effect over the theater. If only this had been all, but when May had spoken with her sisters about the war during a meal, she

had received the news that the First Knight of the Western Territory, Morning Light had also been captured. Hearing this, her heart immediately squeezed together.

Afterward, May directly rushed to the theater, looking for Irene to ask her about the situation only to discover that Irene had followed him two weeks ago and went to Border Town, probably to reunite with her husband. Hearing this news, May felt a little depressed, but at the same time, there was also a little envy mixed in with it.

They both worked in the same theater, and she really deserved to play the leading figure, while Irene was the yet-to-rise newcomers, the flower of tomorrow, but the title only came from that group of inferiors actors who were flattering each other all the time. In regards to her appearance, May was confident that she would never lose to anyone. On the side of family background, although she was only from civilian's origin, Irene, however, was only an orphan adopted by the theater, so when comparing themselves, she had a lot stronger standing than Irene did.

However, this hardly gave May any relief. Ferlin Eltek the Morning Light still developed feelings for Irene with her naïve looking face. Later he even married her, even giving up his family inheritance for this.

“Look, there is farmland in front of us,” someone shouted, “We can’t be too far from Border Town now.”

May looked to the left side of the ship, there she saw rows of knee-high wheat swaying in the wind and farmers wearing straw

hats were busying themselves in the fields as if they were standing within a green sea. The clear river water reflected the wheatfields extending westwards, with no end in sight.

“Such a beautiful scenery, Miss May,” Rosia walked over, nodding her head in greeting.

“In such a remote place, I never expected that I would see such a vast farmland not inferior to the farmland around Longsong Stronghold.

“That’s nothing compared with the farmland around King’s City,” May disagreed. “There, the wheat fields are so large that they even connect between two cities, along the roads, the only thing you can see are wheat fields, so the people soon become bored of it.”

“Is that so?” She smiled awkwardly, “I’ve never been that far away.”

Well, this is the response ordinary people should show, May thought, in case it was Irene who had heard these words, I am afraid she will just show an expression of envy and ask myself to tell her more. “Rest assured, you will have the opportunity to get there one day.”

“I hope so,” Rosia patted her chest, “Thank you for your encouragement.”

I mean you only have to spend some silver royals, with that you can take the caravan to King's City, I never meant that you would ever have the chance to go to King's City to perform, May rolled her eyes within her mind. But the other was still only one of Irene's friends, so May didn't want to bother herself to speak those words.

Rosia had joined the theater before herself, and her age also followed closely with her own, but because of her plain appearance and poor memory, she had never gotten the opportunity to officially perform on stage. In addition to Irene, there were only a few people who were willing to deal with her.

"Irene knows that we are coming today?" May asked.

"In my reply to her, I informed her of the date, so I'm sure that she will be meeting us at the docks.

"Then it should be all right," she nodded. "I do not want to be alone in a strange town, and have to look for lodging in an inn."

"Can I ask you something, Miss May?" Rosia asked hesitantly, "Why was it important for you to leave together with us for the town, moreover, why did you also want to conceal this from the theater? Irene's said that this was a small opportunity for those who won't be started elsewhere, but you are not someone who lacks such opportunities."

"In case I had told them the truth, do you think the theater would ever let me come to this place?" May curled her lips in

disdain, “As to why I want to come here... I merely want to see if my theater comrade is having a good life.”

After all, I do not know why I have made this impulse decision myself! the Longsong Stronghold’s theater is performing a drama in the next two days. And now that I’m gone, I am afraid that the theater owner really have a headache. Although there are several backups who can play my part, without my name, the aristocracy may not be willing to accept it, they might even send a grave protest to the theater.

Honestly, this wasn’t a wise choice, May also knew this, her own reputation relied heavily on the theater in Longsong Stronghold. And if she annoyed the theater owner, he could simply turn it into a cold environment for her and start promoting another actress, if it came to that, she would have no way of ever fighting back. It was important that she uncompromisingly acknowledged her mistake. Otherwise, she would have no choice than to leave right away and go to another theater and try to compete with their stars.

Or...I could also take the next ship back to the stronghold, the moment after I have met up with Ferlin, right? May thought.

“So that’s how it was,” Rosia nodded in understanding, “Irene will certainly be very surprised to see you.”

The scenery along the river bank gradually become richer, the closer they came to the Impassable Mountain Ridge the more tents and wooden houses that appeared. It was close to noon at this time, and the peasant women were all busy cooking porridge stew, covering the residential area with its smell, letting May also

occasionally smell the floating over aromatic fragrance of wheat. Children had come together to the river to play, and those who were able to swim shed of their clothes and surrounded by the cheers of their companions jumped headlong into the river, only to triumphantly climb back ashore afterward.

Then May finally saw the pier.

After the Swan had landed, Ghent and Sam volunteered to handle all of the ladies baggage. And after a pedestrian had just left the ship, Rosia excitedly shouted: “Irene!”

May, following the direction of her shout, on the pier she detected a woman wearing a white dress and weaving in their direction. And directly by her side stood a tall man. Even across the great distance, she could still make out his straight and vigorous body that was out of the ordinary.

Ferlin Eltek, the Morning Light.

The figure in May’s memory became clear once more.

Chapter 186 - The Star Of The Theater (Part 2)

The moment May spotted him, she immediately put away all thoughts of returning to the stronghold.

“My God, M-May!” When May came over, Irene exclaimed in disbelief. Irene grabbed her hands and pulled her towards the knight, “Darling, do you know who she is? She is the most famous actress of the Longsong Theater, Miss May! Whenever she performs, the people who want to see her play line-up from the theater’s lobby and into the streets!”

Although the phrase “darling” caused May’s heart jump, her perennial acting habits allowed her to reflexively smile and give a little nod, “Hello.”

“Ah, of course I know about her. You’ve even told me about her being one of the most famous actress in the West, there aren’t any nobles who do not know the name for the star of theater,” he sighed, then spoke in an apologetic tone to May, “My wife is a little lacking in her some manners. I’m Ferlin, welcome.”

He didn’t announce his name or his status, and even concealed his family name. May’s heart was filled with sadness, but on the surface she maintained her utmost elegant expression, “I’m familiar with you. Everyone in the West knows of the First Knight of the Western Territory, ‘Morning Light’, Sir Eltek. I must apologize, because of the stress of theater work, I was unable to attend your and Irene’s wedding.”

“That’s a thing of the past,” the knight said with a smile as he shook his head. “Nowadays, I’m just a teacher, and I no longer belong to the Eltek Family, so you really don’t have to be so polite to me.”

He then waved in the direction of the others and continued. “Let’s go back. We can talk later, but first you have to finish your application for temporary residence.”

Teacher? May was startled, does that mean he’s now a court tutor? The town’s Lord is indeed a prince, but the Prince would never lower himself to find a knight to take on such a role, ha. And what’s all this about applying for temporary residence? Shouldn’t Irene be taking the group of us to a local reliable, and safe inn to stay at?

“I really did not expect you to come here. If you were to play Cinderella, it would certainly cause a sensation!”

“Is that so?” May had some doubt about that. She had never heard the name of that drama, which indicated that it had probably been written by a new playwright. Moreover, it wasn’t like she had spare time for rehearsal, she’d only come here... because she wanted to see how Morning Light was doing, and if there was some way she could help him.

After entering town, May realised that there was definitely something wrong in this place. The town was located on the border of the kingdom and the only role it served was to be an

outpost for the stronghold, so why did it now look like a newly built city? The road everyone was walking on was covered with dark gray gravel, and there was no mud to be seen anywhere on the whole road. Furthermore, the streets were too wide, practically allowing two carriages to pass each other side to side.

“What kind of road is this?” Sam asked the question that was in her mind aloud. “It looks strangely flat.”

“Hehe,” Irene smirked, “When I first arrived here it was still made of mud, but now it’s become like this. Furthermore, the road still isn’t finished yet; the masons have said that this is only the foundation for the actual road.”

“Then they’ve fooled you,” Rosia retorted, “Everyone knows, only houses need a foundation. Things that are already lying on the ground can’t collapse, so why should they need one ~ah?”

“Really, they mix a kind of fine, grayish powder together with stones and then they spread it out. Afterward, they sprinkle water on it and compress it with a stone roller until the road has become flat and smooth. In the beginning, I also thought this was the new sort of road, but the mason said that this was a practice developed by His Highness, it seems to be called... water whatever layer. In short, this is still only the foundation!” Irene turned around and continued leading the way, allowing her long plait to swing with each step, “In the future when more people and carriages start using it, the ground will be paved with slate. Only then will the true road be finished.”

Paved roads? May coldly laughed inside her heart. Other than the

inner city of King's City, which other city in this kingdom could cover its roads with slate? Having such a broad and flat road was already good enough. There were still many mud roads in Longsong Stronghold.

Along the way through the town, she saw how many houses on both sides of the road were being demolished, regardless of whether it was a clay-tile roofed house or a wooden house. Although they were clearly not new houses, they still a far cry from being called uninhabitable. “Did the Lord drive them away because they were blocking the road?”

“No, they’ve all moved to another district.”

“District?” May asked.

“It is the new residential area, where everyone gets exactly the same brick house to stay in,” Irene explained. “All the original residents had been assigned one, that means there will be no leaking or broken houses in town.

Everyone can be allocated to a brick house? May could not believe her ears, this was even more exaggerated than paved streets. Does she have any idea how much such an idea will cost? But since she was in front of Ferlin, she still had to swallow her words.

There were a lot of other pedestrians on the street, so they would occasionally be stopped by people who wanted to greet Irene or Ferlin. Thanks to this, May found out that Irene was also one of

those so-called teachers.

“Aren’t you going to perform in the play?” She asked. “Why do the townspeople call you a teacher, Irene?”

“Because that is my job. I will only be performing part-time. After all, Border Town can’t have a theater.” Afterwards, Irene told the story of how had been summoned by His Highness, “Although it will be an open-air performance and the audience will only consist of civilians, the pay will be still calculated according to that of the stronghold. I think this is a good chance. At least, in this way I can still practice.”

“You are right, you are right. As long as I can go on stage I would be satisfied.” Ghent and Sam nodded again and again.

And open-air performance for civilians! May simply didn’t have the strength to retort. Compared with Irene, she could not understand why the Prince came up with this idea or what his intentions were in the end. Could those people whose purpose every day was only to have enough to eat and stay alive really comprehend the romance and its twist and turns of a drama?

In this manner, they finally came to a stop in front of a two-story building.

“This is the teachers’ building, right now Border Town only has nine teachers. Therefore there are still many vacant rooms left. Ferlin had already applied for you to stay inside the house and he’d also got the rights for you to temporarily stay in two rooms. So you

will be living here during the show.” Irene handed out two keys, “Ghent, Sam, this one is for you. Rosia and Tina will get the other one, eh, Miss May’s...”

“I’ll stay with you,” May suddenly blurted.

“But...”

“I came here to see how the lives of my theater companions were,” she said with a smile. “After all, we have already been working together for such a long time, and you probably also will never return to the stronghold, so I want to talk some more with you. Are you going to hold this against me?”

“Of course not!” Irene happily took hold of her hands, “I’m just worried that the room is too small for you to live in. There are also a lot of things I also want to ask you!” Then she turned around to face the other four, “Let’s first put away the luggage, then you can come over to my room and we can sit and read the script together.”

May climbed up to the second floor and followed Irene and Ferlin into their new home.

Stepping in, her last hope was shattered.

Although she didn’t want to admit it, this small room gave off a comfortable and clean feeling. The tablecloths and curtains were obviously new; recently purchased and made of a red and white thin cotton. The floor had been swept spotless, they had a linen

carpet in the living room. In it some strange cups had been placed on a low table, which attracted May at her first glance.

Stepping forward, she picked them up to take a closer look, but even after a moment she was still unable to identify its material or why it was so light. It was a bit like wood, but the surface of it was smooth and full of brilliant color; it was nothing like those cheap goods affordable by civilians. Depicted on top of the cup were also two people who were affectionately holding each other.

“It is a charming cup, right?” Irene, said as she leaned over , “They are too expensive. They were sold for five silver royals at the convenience market and the four of them made a set, containing all different postures of people. To celebrate our first payday, Ferlin insisted on buying them for me which in the end resulted in us spending our whole salary. That fool.”

“Convenience market?” May deliberately ignored the other part.

“Right!” Irene said, nodding, “The Lord has opened a market at the town’s square, where they are selling some very fine daily necessities, but their prices aren’t low either. If you want, I can take you there tomorrow and you can have a look.”

May had mixed feelings in her heart. The situation was completely different than she had expected it to be. She thought that, as a defeated captive, and a knight for whom no one had been willing to pay ransom, even if the Lord had released him, his life would still have been very difficult. And since Irene didn’t perform regularly, she wouldn’t have had any savings. Therefore, besides accompanying him during his hardship, she wouldn’t be able to

help him in any other way.

At that time, Ferlin Eltek would have seen any assistance she gave as sending charcoal during snowy weather. Maybe even one step further, by relying on her influence, she could try to persuade the local Lord to allow to her redeem the First Knight. That way, she would have been able to completely reverse the knight's heart.

But... she found that all her ideas had come to nothing, and not only didn't he not need her help, furthermore he was also leading a good life in Border Town.

Should she go back? But, if she now chose to leave, Ferlin and Border Town would from now on be forgotten forever.

May fell into a swirl of confusion.

Chapter 187 - New Business Organization

As the summer came around, Margaret's river fleet arrived at Border Town.

Roland had intentionally received the female merchant at the pier so that he could incidentally examine the goods she had brought with her.

The most valuable goods were the three boats full of saltpeter. By now, Border Town's gunpowder reserves had basically been exhausted- even the First Army firing exercises had come to a stop. Although they had already started to equip the army with revolver-rifles, they still had to stay in practice with reloading, gun maintenance, and replenishment of their ammunition. Now, with this batch of saltpeter, they could finally resume firing training.

In addition to saltpeter and in accordance with their agreement, she had also brought two ships with ore ingots- these were mainly iron and copper- as well as a portion of green vitriol ore. Just the unloading of these goods already needed two or three days time.

When Roland offered Margaret the opportunity to inspect the two steam engines, he had placed them in an eye-catching position in the yard. Furthermore, he followed his usual practice of covering them in red satin and wrapping them in a fancy pattern. In fact, during nearly the whole month, the West Industrial Company was only able to put one steam engine together while producing hundreds of scrap parts. Because of that, Roland had Anna process the defective parts that didn't deviate too much from the desired product and had her fuse them together into a second

steam engine to catch up with the delivery schedule.

To Roland's surprise, Margaret had not come alone this time- she had also brought a group of merchants from King's City with her.

When the delivery of the goods was organized, Margaret and her partner followed Roland back to the castle where they enjoyed a sumptuous lunch in the reception hall.

"Your Highness, this is Hogger, an old friend of mine. He owns one of the largest mining business in King's City." Margaret pointed at them one after another, "This is Gammon and Marlan. They belong to the Crescent-Moon-Bay Caravan. They were very interested in learning more about these steam engines, and since I have known them for many years, I was too embarrassed to sell it to them myself, so I brought them with me so that I could introduce them to you.

"I offer my regards to Your Honored Highness," said Hogger, puffing out his large belly while his face glistened with grease: "Margaret told me that this machine can be used in the place of manpower, and that it can quickly pump water and transport ore out of a mine. Moreover, it doesn't have to take a break and can run throughout the whole day. Would it be possible that I see it with my own eyes?"

"Of course," Roland sipped a mouthful of wine. At first, he had been completely unable to adapt to its sour taste, but he had gradually gotten used to it. "But if you want to make it carry ore, you also have to install the railroad system. After lunch, I can take you to the North Slope Mine, where you can see it for yourself."

“Your Royal Highness, I am also very curious about all the different uses of the steam engine that you’ve described. Can it really be installed on a sailboat and move it forward without sails?” Marlan began to ask, “In case it is possible, would it be possible for it to resemble a three or four-masted sea-going ship? I’m afraid that it wouldn’t be strong enough.”

“In that regard, steam engines are just like horses. Some of them have a lot of force while others have less; it depends on the type of model it is. Of course, machines with a greater output are naturally more expensive. And when one isn’t strong enough, you can also install more, like maybe two or four of them.” Roland answered with a smile.

To use a steamer on board, even if it’s the most primitive paddler, it would also need a complex power transmission and handling system. In addition to Border Town, there isn’t any other place in the Kingdom of Graycastle that has the technology needed to modify a ship. But the installation cost would certainly be much higher than that of the steam engine itself.

“In that case, the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan also wants to order those machines from you.” Gammon forked a steam bun that had just left the steam basket and stuffed it into his mouth, but its fresh juices were so hot that he narrowed his eyes.

Sure enough, similar people always group together. The friend of rich people will always also be rich. Even without seeing the actual product, they finalized an order right away, as if thousands of gold royals were nothing in their eyes.

Roland shook his head, “Unfortunately, at the moment, Border Town lacks manpower. With the issue that the steam engine is very complicated to create, I am afraid it will be difficult to produce any additional machines before Margaret’s order is completed.

“I can provide you with the needed manpower, Your Honored Highness,” Gammon said, patting his chest. “Both carpenters and blacksmiths, even shipbuilders if needed. I have a lot of them stationed at my dock, and they would all come free of charge!”

“And then you’d have them learn the manufacturing method so that you can produce it yourself?” Hogger interrupted.

“Ten years, your Highness,” Gammon opened his palms, “I am willing to let them work for you for ten years, and there will be only one requirement– that is that the first steam engine made by them will be offered to the Crescent-Moon-Bay Caravan.

That is an attractive offer, Roland thought, it would be the same sort of technology partnerships later, where our side would only provide the technology and still make a significant profit, while they wouldn’t only get the steam engine as soon as possible, but also get a number of skilled workers after a decade. In this way, the workers’ salaries would be equivalent to the cost of purchasing the technology.

“I don’t think we have to be so urgent to finalize a deal, we can take our time discussing the details after I have shown you the

“machine,” Roland pushed his hands onto the table, “Furthermore, the steam engine isn’t the only product we have here that is worth buying. There are some other things you might also be interested in— for example, this.” He snapped his fingers, and on his command, a group of guards took some objects out of a wooden box and placed them on the table.

“These are the newest creations of Border Town. No matter which of them you choose, they are all of the best quality but still at a reasonable price. For example, this simple mug,” Roland pointed at a colorful cup on the table and said, “It is light, pleasing to the eye, and yet not as fragile as a crystal cup. The pattern above can also be customized. Furthermore it won’t get wet, so it is very easy to clean.

“It won’t get wet?” Margaret picked up a cup and took a carefully look at it.

“You can try it with some wine,” the Prince joked. “And after you’ve drunk from it, you can pretend to be drunk and throw it on the ground to break it apart.

“It works, gee, this really is very excellent... But, I’m afraid you won’t be able to guarantee that every cup will have such a quality, right?” The big bellied Hogger had already poured himself a cup full of wine and threw it back at this time, “Hey, it’s really still dry.”

Of course, it was still dry, it was essentially just an ordinary wooden cup merely coated with one of Soraya’s paintings. The pattern on top of it was of her own design. “It does not conflict

with the usage of crystal cup, those are for more of a formal court banquet while my cups are more suited for the personal chambers of the daughters of wealthy houses.” Roland said, “As far as I know, they like bright colors, and can’t resist things with such a beautiful appearance.”

“I believe it is as you’ve said,” Margaret said while nodding in interest. “You seem to have a lot of experience in this field.”

“Keke,” the Prince coughed twice, “and now, please fix your eyes on this one. The thickness of the breastplate is entirely uniform, and the back and front are made out of wrought iron. I don’t think I even have to mention that it is lighter than a knight’s plate armor, and it is possible to put it on without assistance. After it is closed, there doesn’t exist even the smallest crack; it is perfectly suitable for the guards escorting caravans. But the most crucial point is that it is cheaper than plate armor... ”

...

After the presentation of all the goods, the merchants began whispering to one another. To allow them some privacy, Roland offered them some time for discussion and left the hall, going over to the flower garden at a side corridor to get some fresh air.

“Your Royal Highness, I was only away for a month, and you already have a lot of new things here.” Margaret had stood to come follow him.

“Don’t you want to exchange your opinions with them?”

“No, the moment I set my eyes on something it’s unnecessary for me to try and listen to other people’s thoughts. When there is good merchandise to be had, whether other people see its worth or not, it’s all the same to me.”

She smiled and shook her head, “Our caravan will be staying here for three to four days, so could you... Let me see Lightning again?”

“Although she does not recognize you, at least she didn’t express any sentiment of dislike towards you, so I think that there won’t be a problem.

“Thank you,” Margaret said gratefully.

“If you’re going to stay for so long, you might as well come see a play. Three days from now, Border Town will hold its first theatrical performance.”

“You were able to build a theater in one month?” Margaret exclaimed, shocked at the idea.

“Of course not, it will be an open-air performance right in the middle of town square. I think it will be different than what you are used to.”

“I will do so right away. Deference is no substitute for obedience, Your Highness,” Margaret placed her hand on her chest and performed a low bow.

Chapter 188 - “On With The Show!”

Two days later, after the visit to the North Slope Mine, Roland agreed to a new trade contract with Hogger and the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan.

Hogger’s eyeballs had nearly fallen out after he saw the smoothly operating railway-transport mining system. He even put forth an application to build a factory in Border Town, which would specialize in the construction of rail lines and their supplementary equipment, while the profits he obtained would be split in half, but Roland refused his investment offer as it would need even more of his people. After all, right now Border Town wasn’t lacking in money, but people.

Hogger, after all, was just a mining businessman. Although he possessed several mines, and managed an open-air silver mine for Count Kanbara at Silver City. The men below him were only miners. Which was on an entirely different scale compared with the strength of an entire island like Crescent Moon Bay.

In the end, he put his name under a contract ordering ten steam engines and a full set for the mine transportation system (including their track and tub), set to be delivered in six months from the date. The first half were to be delivered before the Months of Demons, and the second half around the start of the coming year.

The contract with the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan was of a much larger scale than his previous deals, including even a ten years contract with them. Next time the caravan arrived, it would bring

a team of 300 people with it, mainly composed of blacksmiths and carpenters.

These people's salaries would be paid for by the Crescent Moon Bay, while Roland only had to provide for their food and accommodation. The steam engines produced by them would be sold with the highest priority given to Crescent Moon Bay, and then after the ten years, the worker could decide for themselves if they wanted to stay or go back. This was a point that Roland had brought up several times during the negotiation.

Without a doubt, the people sent with the next caravan would be some of their most trustworthy supporters, even for the people shipped in later with the caravans, they were bound to try choosing people with the highest degree of loyalty to the Crescent Moon Bay.

So when it then came for them to making their decision, it was unknown if even half of them would decide to stay. However Roland could never have enough skilled workers, so even if only one of them decided to stay behind, he would still have made a profit. Something he always worried about was that, even though he had the technical advantage, he might not have enough people to bring the technology to reality.

Apart from the steam engine, the second largest order was for the transformation of their vessels.

Along with the three hundred craftsmen, the Crescent Moon Caravan would bring two inland sailing ships in the hope that Border Town would convert them into ships that could be driven

by steam engine. Each ship's conversion would come with a fee of one thousand eight hundred gold royals, which meant that the two ships would come up to directly exceed Margaret's steam engine order. In contrast, despite that all three sides ordering the mugs, the total amount of the order was still less than 300 gold royals, even though Roland had already increased the price of the mugs to what it was in his convenience store by ten times. This let him feel the gap in the profit between civilian merchandise and industrial products. If you are unable to mass produce, it would be better to only satisfy the requirements of Border Towns inhabitants.

What surprised the Prince a little was that his iron breastplates, and the iron farming tools were completely disregarded. But later, during dinner, Margaret offered him the answer to his doubts, "Although your breastplates are indeed cheaper, however its yield is too small, if we want to resell it, we have to include the transportation cost together with the tax. So, in the end we would only make a profit of 5 to 6 gold royals. Moreover, your armor is either forged with a hydraulic hammer or by using the steam engine... In either case, with that method, the price of the armor will stay fixed, and the majority of the expense will come from the quality of the material, rather than the quality of its production."

After a short pause she continued, "And buying them for our own usage, is even more unnecessary. On the sea, whether it be the sailors or the guards, they rarely wear heavy armor, which would only make them sink more quickly in the case they were to fall into the water. Most of the time, they see armor as fetters and handcuffs, not as protection."

"It's the same with your farming tools, if you cannot obtain an enormous amount of cheaply-priced iron, they will be cheaper but

not by much when compared to similar local goods, which makes it difficult to make a profit off them. While the situation with those colorful cups is completely different, their price isn't at a fixed number, it can't be said for sure that the nobility will fond of them, but it is still possible to earn several times our initial investment.”

“After thinking about it for a while, Roland had to admit that this was indeed the case... the price for the armor and farm tools was stable, and since the material costs accounted for the bulk of the price, it was still difficult to force the price down by forging them with his more efficient steam engine instead of the hydraulic hammer, so, in the end, the difference was too small to attract the interest of a big merchant.

In addition, these plate armors' which had Soraya's anti-stabbing coating on it, was actually a part of the First Army's armament upgrade, so until the iron production didn't go up, it would be impossible to sell in large amounts.

...

Soon, it was time for the anticipated theater premiere.

On this afternoon, even though Roland had demolished the surrounding buildings, which doubled the size of the former central square, the town square was still so tightly packed that not even a drop would be able to trickle through.

To promote the play, Roland had already started informing

people about it a week ahead of time. Moreover, he had specially requested the Ministry of Agriculture to send people to the outskirts of the town and mobilize the serfs to come watch the drama.

Roland, as the town's Lord naturally had the best view point. In the direction of the stage, directly facing the show, Karl had erected a temporary wooden platform. It was made up of three rows of wooden benches, which could accommodate about a 100 people, and the place in the middle of the third row was reserved for Roland. On one side, were places for the members of the Witch Union, with Anna sitting next to him, while on the other side the merchant group had taken their place, with Margaret sitting as his direct neighbor.

The first and second rows were mostly filled with City Hall officials and their apprentices.

In order to ensure their safety, the people surrounding the wooden platform were made up of members from the First Army, who could watch the drama while at the same time separated the location of the Prince from the civilian population.

Now, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the sun's burning heat had already faded and together with a fresh breeze from time to time which was produced by Wendy, everyone on the platform could enjoy a VIP level treatment.

Under the applause of the crowd, the actors stepped onto the stage one by one.

To tell the truth, Roland was completely unsure of what kind of result the premiere would achieve in the end. After giving the script to Irene, he no longer interevent in the drama. The recruiting and rehearsal have been fully done by her and Ferlin. Now, in retrospect, how much experience could a theater newcomer, who had only appeared on stage once have gathered? And the friends recruited by her, were those people who had never gotten the chance to perform on stage in Longsong Stronghold, only here in a small town could they become actors.

In other words, this was a newly created team of new actors, who planned to perform a new drama.

Fortunately, Roland didn't mind if it became a failure, after all, this drama wasn't meant to sell tickets and also not there to promote a good script. The only goal of the show was to remold the people's ideology and free them of their prejudices, for this to happen it had to be performed more than once. So even if this time they didn't play out well, they would undoubtedly have improved by the time of the next performance.

"Now, I finally understand why you were so confident in this show," Margaret suddenly exclaimed, "you invited Miss May!"

Roland got startled, "Who?"

"Do not tell me you do not know about it yourself, my God! Before I came here, I've also seen her show in King's City," Margaret smacked her lips, "No matter if it is taking hold of her

character or the build up of emotions, she is the best. I do not know how many people she has already moved to tears with her performance in “Prince seeking for love”, even Kadin Faso was full of praise for her!”

“Who is Kadin Faso?” Roland went through his memories bus he couldn’t find any impression of him within his head.

“...Your Royal Highness, are you really a person from King’s City?” Margaret blinked with her eyes. “Please give me the liberty to ask, who is the most famous person in King’s City, apart from the people of the court?”

“Yorko ‘The Devil’s hand’ ” Roland blurted out, but directly afterward he knew it was the wrong answer.

“Oh,” the businesswoman gave him a meaningful glance. “The most famous playboy, I heard that with one hand alone he could get a woman to never forget him... I understand.“

“Relies only on one hand?” Anna leaned over, “What for?”

“No-Nothing.” Roland slammed himself on the forehead, “We had better earnestly follow along with the drama.”

Chapter 189 - Stars And Flowers

The play didn't have a theater curtain, nor an introduction, their preparation area was separated from the stage by a board, their stage was simple and crude, and for most of the cast it would be the first formal performance of their lives.

"This story takes place in the capital of a kingdom. Within the outer city, there lived a beautiful and kind-hearted girl..."

Accompanied by the sound of the narration, Irene slowly walked onto the stage. Her whole attire was a filthy gray gown, the hair on top of her head was a hideous mess, and her face was covered with dust.

Swinging the broom in her hand, she was carefully cleaning the ground, from time to time even bending down to wipe the difficult to remove dirt using the end of her gown.

After several days of rehearsal, Irene had thoroughly memorized the whole story's process in her heart. The story was quite simple: a civilian girl had lost her mother, and was now constantly being bullied at her home, but because of the girl's kindness she was then rescued by a witch, who used her magic power to give the girl the opportunity to participate in the prince's party, where the prince and she fell in love the first moment they saw each other.

But since the witch's magic was only effective for a limited time, she was forced to leave the ball in a hurry, and in her panic she left behind a crystal shoe. In order to find the beautiful girl, the prince

had the whole city be searched. Ultimately, he found her in the outer city, and from then on the two of them lived happily ever after.

The story was simple and easy to understand, yet its plot completely broke away from the former description of a princess and a prince's love, by allowing a common girl, who due to her kind nature gained the assistance of a witch, be able to win the prince's favor. As the Cinderella of this performance, the part where the character gathered up her courage to resist the oppression she had to face her whole life, would be the actress greatest highlight of the performance.

So Irene had never imagined that May would give the leading position to her.

Irene was already euphoric enough that the star of the Western Territory was willing to share the stage with her. Moreover, as the pillar of the stronghold's theater, May had enough pride and confidence to play the leading role in all kinds of theater stages, yet in "Cinderella" she took the initiative to play the supportive character of the half-sister.

This was somewhat hard to believe for Irene, until the other side repeatedly emphasized that this was a performance of new kind of character, and that Irene had the talent needed to play Cinderella.

In the next rehearsal, she gathered all of her strength, not only to repeatedly practice every scene, but also when lying in her bed, even after the candles had gone out, she would still be going through the acting skills taught to her by May. So as not to fail to

live up to the other side's good intentions.

Fortunately, Irene was not without experience, so being on stage while having the eyes of countless people on her, she relaxed her body, and let the repeatedly practiced actions reappear one by one. Until now, she felt that she was in good shape and hadn't made any errors. She even encouraged Rosia, playing the witch, with her eyes when the other had forgotten her lines.

"I split the wheat porridge in half, but do not eat too quickly; it is still very hot."

"Thank you for your kindness, young woman, I will surely repay you."

When Rosia bent her back and crookedly walked backstage, one after another the masses began to applaud – making Irene feel relieved. After all, she knew that, when someone forgot their words during a formal performance at the stronghold's theater it would count as an utterly intolerable error. The nobility would immediately begin to boo and ridicule the actor, rather than trying to encourage the artist with applause.

At this point, it was May's debut.

This part of the story was about the conflict of the mean older sister and Cinderella. Under the bullying and humiliation of the older sister, Cinderella could only hide in the basement and begin to tearing up as she held the portrait of her birth mother in her arms.

But now, as May stood before her, Irene suddenly felt that the atmosphere had completely changed.

She was no longer the quiet and taciturn theater star she had been during the rehearsals. Instead, she had turned into the ruler of the stage. With her lofty manners, her just perfectly executed body movements and unhidden contempt in her eyes, she placed Irene under a strong feeling of oppression.

“Oh, take a look at that, who is this ? Under what kind of delusion are you to think you don’t have to work in broad daylight?

“You poor wretch shall return without delay and wash my dress!”

“And you’d better be not clumsy, this is a formal banquet dress. You cannot afford to damage it by even a little.”

After her words, May ferociously pushed her back, and according to the plot Irene was supposed to pretend to fall, but under the cold look in May’s eyes she couldn’t stop herself from taking a few steps back, accidentally tripping over her own feet and falling to the ground without any buffer-her elbow hit the stage floor and sent a burst of pain through her body.

“Truly just a useless waste...” May’s eyes were no longer set on her. Instead, she went to the center of the stage, facing the silent crowd on the square and began her monologue.

“That’s worthy of Miss May,” Margaret whispered amazed. “Just with a few simple words from her she was able to attract the attention of everyone, her character has already become alive.”

“Oh, indeed impressive,” Roland nodded, but this person was also way too ferocious and overdid it. The loathe and disdain she showed toward Irene, seems as if it was her real feelings. Even sitting back here, I could feel her ruthlessness. How infectious her emotional appeal was could be seen in the expression of the entire audience... However, she was not the protagonist ah. Irene’s relatively good performance had been suddenly completely overshadowed, if this goes on, I’m afraid the leading role will be overtaken by a supporting character.

Irene was stunned.

She knew she had to stand up quickly. May’s monologue, which was primarily about her longing for the prince, as well as the court ball, wouldn’t last long. So before the end of the scene, she had to leave the stage. But her familiar feeling from the previous rehearsals had already left her, turning the stage into a complete and utter stranger to her.

Are you only on this level?

Only when May finished her act and while passing by weaved her skirt so that its edge slapped against Irene’s face, was she able to recover. Even though the other didn’t say a word, but by looking into the cold eyes of the star from the West, Irene could

understand her meaning. May had wanted to say that Irene should pull herself together. Since their two character's personalities were like fire and water, once May reached out her hand, the play would be ruined! She clenched her lips, spreading an iron taste through her mouth. When she saw May disappeared behind the board, she also wanted to get up and leave. However, Ghent and Same carrying props had already stepped on the stage. When Sam placed a bucket in front of her, he took the chance to say in a small voice, "The next scene is still yours, just stay here while we work. Come on, you can do it!"

Irene knew that this wasn't according to the script, to be truth... she had already missed the opportunity to leave.

Thus the audience saw an unusual change of scenery. Cinderella sat motionless on the stage, while her surrounding scene has been modified from the living room into the basement, changing the beautiful round table and wooden chairs into barrels and rattan baskets. While people who handled the props went back and forth, the girl maintained her position, as if she was frozen in time.

In the next act, Cinderella was trapped in the basement, and the witch came back to rescue her. Not only giving her beautiful clothes, but also summoning a carriage, which sent her directly to the castle.

"Remember, the spell will only last until midnight, so you must leave the palace before the last bell rings, or the clothes and the carriage will disappear."

"A... yes. I've got it. Thank you."

At this moment Irene was still unable to shake off her daze, hiding in the background she secretly watched May's play. She only thought that the other actor seemed to be completely free, in front of more than a thousand viewers she still had a blossoming smile, what a powerful woman she was. Standing on the stage and having to face the bright star, only then did she thoroughly realized how amazing her counterparts acting was.

Is this the distance between stars and flowers?

When Rosia finished her dry lines, it was time for the first drama: the court ball. In order to achieve the effect of a grand ball, the scene needed the whole cast to go on stage – in addition to her, and May, Ghent, Sam, Rosia, and Tina were dressed as other noble dancers that were wearing masks. And dressed as the prince, was her lover, Ferlin.

Chapter 190 - Victory And defeat

“The actor playing the prince is quite handsome, yet his facial expressions are very stiff.”

“Ah, unexpectedly he is...” Roland was somewhat surprised, “Morning Light, the First Knight in the Western Territories. At present, he holds the position as a teacher in Border Town. He can’t be regarded as an actor.”

“He isn’t an actor?” the businesswoman asked, flabbergasted, “Then how can he go on stage?”

“Because of limited staff.” he laughed, “Just take a look, there is no one besides those two who handled the previous change of setting. If the prince were to be played by one of them, it would truly... be unlikely for Cinderella to fall in love at first sight with either of them, based on their appearances.”

“...you are right.”

While changing into her beautiful dress, Irene stood on the side and had to watch as May walked towards Ferlin’s side. Irene saw how May placed her hand on his shoulder and began to dance – no, Ferlin wasn’t dancing, he was merely being guided by May’s exquisite dancing skills and following along with each of her steps. This dance wasn’t part of the rehearsal; Irene was aware that this was May’s improvisation.

“Her older sister tried to seduce the prince in every way possible,

yet the prince remained unmoved, merely keeping his manners and talking; until Cinderella appeared in front of him. His eyes wandered over and took in the sight of the charming and delicate woman, who had bright eyes and white teeth.”

Irene knew that as soon as she walked past him, according to the script, Ferlin was meant to throw May aside, there by staging his and her tale of love at first sight. However, anyone who was able to see would likely ask, for what reason should the prince dump the beautiful and touching woman at his side, for the presently so muddleheaded Irene who completely lacked any allure?

At this moment, she saw Ferlin turn his gaze towards her at last.

In his gaze she saw helplessness, comfort, encouragement, and... she also saw his love.

Irene suddenly felt the stage become quiet. The people's laughter, their voices, and the sound of their arguments was gone, her theater companions were also gone. Only May, Ferlin, and herself was left on the stage.

Sure! My acting skills are a far cry from the Star of the West, so does that mean I should just give up and admit defeat?

No, said a soft voice at the bottom of her heart; no, she wanted to act. To her, this was a rare opportunity, or... more than likely, her last chance. If she were to give up now, she would probably never have the opportunity to stand on the same stage with such an outstanding actress ever again.

She also wanted to become like May, able to lead the audience's emotions with her behavior, gathering everyone's attention on her alone.

I'm sorry, May. She said in her heart.

If the prince was played by just some random theater actor, it would already be difficult enough for her to gather the courage to compete. By relying on her acting skills alone, it would almost be impossible for her to beat the Star of the West.

But he isn't just anyone. He is Morning Light. He is my lover, Irene thought, please, forgive me for being so shameless. It's just that... I never want to lose in front of him.

The stage completely disappeared. Instead, a cornfield appeared in front of Irene's eyes. The heavy ears of wheat were already ripe and hanging heavily, gently swinging in the evening breeze, just waiting to be plucked. In the distance, the sun slowly disappeared behind the horizon, coating the slowly flowing Redwater River in many warm colors. This was the place where they had frequently met up for their tryst. In this red-orange sunset, the 'prince' changed back into the 'knight', turning back into the man with whom she had fallen in love with so many years ago.

As long as it was in front of him, she could always let her most beautiful side bloom, making it impossible for him to move his view away from her... no longer acting, but instead showing off her true self, Irene lifted her robe, tied a knot in it and walked

towards Ferlin.

Now when her heart was full of confidence, everything seemed so natural. The moment she reached the knight's side, she smiled to May, and the latter unconsciously loosened the hand resting on his shoulders.

"May I have this dance?" She asked.

Ferlin's natural smiling expression reappeared within his eyes, "Of course you can, my lady."

Although she wasn't as skilled as May, under her guidance, the knight moved more naturally than his former jumping. The two people's tacit understanding in the scene infected the audience, which began to applauding and whistling, followed with their cheers.

All the clamor brought Irene back to the stage. Stepping on her toes, she gently placed a kiss on the Prince's cheek, before she pushed him away, turned around, and quickly ran offstage. At the same time, the deep and resounding sound of the bells rolled over the square and came back as a faint echo from the far off mountains. Not much longer, and it would be the midnight.

Soon, the drama came to its end, but with it also came the end of the play.

On his search, the prince went from house-to-house in the city

and he finally came to Cinderella's home, but this time the young lady wore a dirty and gray robe and was holding a broom in her hands while being pushed to the side by her older sister. The sister was still beautiful and she could also put on the crystal shoe.

"Your Highness, why are you still hesitating? I am the person you are looking for."

"No, she is not."

"Y-you shut up!"

Even though right now, May's performance was no less perfect than before, and was even more oppressing, but Irene no longer cringed away from her. Instead, she came out of her corner, slowly arriving at the central stage. There, she looked straight into the eyes of her counterpart with an unyielding look, full of resistance.

Everyone watching this beautiful scene began to clap.

At this moment, the witch suddenly appeared. She reached out with her hands and put the ball's dress on Cinderella once more-

"Your Royal Highness, she is the person you are looking for."

Rosia forcefully tore off the gray robe on Irene, exposing her beautiful dress. Almost at the same time, she stroked through Cinderella's wild hairstyle, smoothing it out, and with this, the Cinderella who had snatched away the prince's heart appeared in

front of everyone once again.

The atmosphere of the audience immediately began to overflow.

When the prince embraced Cinderella, everyone stood up, and a timely gun salute could be heard from outside the grounds, pushing the people's mood to the peak. The endless applause and cheering continued until the narration came to its conclusion and the actors bowed and left. Only then did the audience stop.

"This was incredible," Margaret clapped enthusiastically, "I thought that the young woman would be overwhelmed by May. I never expected the result that she would be able to come back. Furthermore, I do not know whether or not it was an illusion, but her interaction with the prince felt even more natural than May's, it was as if... she was meant to be together with the prince."

"It was indeed surprising," Roland nodded. Irene had changed her entire personality at the end; which must have been her inherited acting skills which arisen, as a result giving her the capacity to maintain her self-confidence even under May's overwhelming personality.

In a short time, the prince had changed back into her husband, breaking away from the stocks and chains; this kind of ability was also very outstanding. In the future, in all likelihood, she will become a rising star. Furthermore, the ringing bells and salute created by Echo were equally perfect. Due to not having arranged any practice sessions, Roland had given her freedom at the beginning of the play, but he'd never expecting such a pleasant surprise.

...

I lost, May closed her eyes.

She had spent a lot effort in making sure that Ferlin Eltek would play the role of the prince so that he could see her at the task she was the best at –being on stage– and in this way she could leave a deep impression on him. Ultimately defeating Irene with her acting, she could use this way to show him the gap there was between Irene and herself.

For this, she had nearly stayed a week in the town, even going through rehearsal with people she would at normal times not even look at apart from a quick glance. After being delayed for so long, she was afraid that if she now went back to Longsong Stronghold, the theater boss wouldn't treat her as well as he had before. And the most ridiculous part was that she hadn't even been able to completely defeat Irene on stage. Even though she hadn't lost to her acting skills, she had lost to the other's love.

That being the case, it was time to let go.

May took a deep breath, changed her clothes, and left via the rear face.

When she reached the end of the ladder, she was suddenly greeted by a man.

He was also tall, he stood straight, was handsome, and dressed in shiny silver armor, and was probably one of Border Town's knights – but unlike Morning Light, who always wore a warm smile, he appeared to be arrogant and cold with his raised eyebrow, long and narrow eyes, and thin lips.

“What’s the matter?” May asked with a frown.

“Hello, Miss May,” the moment the other side opened his mouth, the cold air dispersed without a trace, “I’m His Highness’ Chief Knight, Carter Landes. Your performance was so fascinating, may I ask if you would like a drink?”

Chapter 191 - The New King's Bared Teeth

Petrov sipped the black tea, leaned against the soft lord chair, and let go of a long sigh of relief.

Two months had passed since the takeover of Longsong Stronghold, and by now he discovered that he liked the hall more and more. It's step-by-step ascending structure allowed him to overlook the lower standing officials and attendants from the Lord's seat, having such power in his grip let him have a feeling of satisfaction.

During the first month, some small aristocrats stepped out and openly questioned him or secretly planned riots and such things – of course, the people who provoked them from behind the scene came from Elk, Wolf, and several other big families. Following his father's advice, Petrov delivered the commoners who created trouble or belonged to the underground rats directly to the gallows, while the small nobles were imprisoned and after their family paid the ransom were expelled from the Western Territory.

When this method was put into practice and thunder like struck down on them, the situation soon subsided. After all, with the exception of the Honeysuckle Family, the Knights of several other families had been arrested and brought to Border Town. Making it impossible for them to build up any resistance against Petrov's policies. Afterward, he again guided the interest by announcing that the stronghold shall compensate the big families for their loss during the seizure, in this way forming a stable group of nobles who all shared a common interest.

With the exception of the 30% which had been transferred to Border Town, the remaining 70% of the stronghold's income were split into three sections. 30% were used to keep the city operating, 20% were used to appease the other noble families, and the remaining 20% were invested into the Hull's territory.

Nowadays, the old portrait of Duke Ryan that had hung behind the lord's seat was exchanged with a picture of the 4th Prince, Roland Wimbledon, but he already looked forward to the day when it was exchanged with one of himself – a portrait of Petrov Hull.

In case he thoroughly took possession of Longsong Stronghold, they could turn the tax used to operate the city and the one invested into their own territory into one, becoming truly worthy of the name of a dukedom. And the 50% which were used to appease the other nobles could also be saved. Instead, it could then be invested in the stronghold's trade, in exchange generating an even higher income for themselves.

Of course, the premise for all of this was that Roland Wimbledon could conquer the throne and rule as King of the Kingdom of Graycastle.

"My Lord," one of his guards entered the Lord's Hall and handed him a letter, "It contains news from Border Town."

When Petrov heard that the letter had come from Border Town, he immediately straightened the way he sat.

He received the envelope and took a fragile piece of papyrus from it. From the poor quality of the letter, he could immediately recognize that it was from one of his eyes within the ranks of the serfs.

The outcome of the battle two months ago could be said to be an outrageous result. Although Petrov hadn't personally taken part in it, he still had heard a fantastic story from his father. In order to find out the reasons for the Duke's failure, he had dispatched some of his confidants to Border Town. They would pretend to be artisans, herdsman or serfs, and send all the information they had gathered back to the stronghold.

He firmly believed that the others families had done the same.

But so far, each month he had only gotten information from the two people disguised as serfs. Those who had pretended to be craftsmen or herders hadn't given any sound of their presence, as if they had vanished.

In the end had they betrayed him out of their own will, or were they discovered by the prince who totally removed them?

He shook his head, instead focusing his attention on the letter.

The content of the letter was written with charcoal and also crookedly written. In some places it even had some traces of water, indicating that it had been written sneakily while working.

The first paragraph was about how they were building a tower with an unknown purpose at the shore of the Redwater River. At present, they had already erected three of these bases which had a height close to that of the stronghold's city walls and on top of each of those bases, they had placed an enormous metal pot. It seemed that the blacksmiths had constructed the metal pot in town. Afterward transporting it to the river as a whole piece. Then the First Army would surround the iron tower and standing with their back to the iron pot, and on the next day, the tower was magically erected.

"Building"... it's again this word, Petrov thought, it was also mentioned in the previous secret letter, just looking at that information it seems that the Prince is always building something. Last time he had repaired the roads and constructed that bridge, this time he is building that iron tower. Could it be that His Highness is spending all of those gold royals he had plundered from Longsong Stronghold in one go? Furthermore, the function of those towers is still unknown... even though my scouts who are disguised as serfs are not real serfs, but in actuality are knowledgeable knights, so in case that those towers were watchtowers, they would able to see it by the first glance.

Probably those towers are still not entirely built yet, making it difficult to judge their purpose. Petrov shook his head. I should wait until next month, maybe I will get more detailed information then.

He shifted his gaze to the next paragraph.

There he read that for a week a large-scale merchant fleet of an

unknown owner had stayed in the town's dock and afterward left eastwards. During their stay, a lot of ore and saltpeter were also unloaded from the ships.

The purchase of saltpeter is easy to understand, after all the second month of the summer will usually become very hot, and because of this, the castle will consume a significant amount of saltpeter for cooling. Furthermore, it can also be used for cold drinks and fruit juice. As a royal aristocrat, the Prince certainly doesn't want to sweat all day, like the peasants on the fields are.

But the purchase of ingots totally surprised Petrov. After all, Border Town was a source for ore all on its own. I can still remember, prior to the Months of Demons, when I was sent as a messenger to Border Town, Prince Roland had exaggeratedly said that they would be able to double the amount of ore they could sell. But now, the result was that not only didn't they export ore, but had now they are also importing ingots?

This, together with those city wall high like iron towers, meant that Petrov himself was now more and more unable to understand what His Royal Highness wanted to accomplish.

But when Petrov read the last paragraph of the secret letter the contents immediately left Petrov stunned.

In the last two weeks, Border Town had held several open-air theater performances at the town square?

They didn't sell tickets, and the drama's name was also unheard

of. Moreover, they were even encouraging the serfs to go watch. But the most surprisingly part was that one of the performers was the recently vanished Star of the West, Miss May!

What kind of situation is this?

That Miss May had gone missing was the biggest news of recent times. Several of the dramas in which she should have played the leading role, were now played by others, and because of this the nobles had all left halfway through to express their protest. And when they demanded an answer, the theater claimed that Miss May had left without any explanation, and that her whereabouts were currently unknown. When the news had become public, it had caused an uproar among the drama-loving nobles of the Western Territory.

In the end, she went to Border Town? They don't have there any theaters! Furthermore, to be playing in front of civilians and serfs... Petrov's had some difficulty imagining such a picture in his mind since the impression he had gotten from Miss May was that she wasn't a amiable or an approachable actor.

After carefully thinking about it, he decided to write a letter to His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon, officially inquiring about this matter. As a theater enthusiast himself, in the past months he had been unable to see the fantastic performance of the Star of the West, not to mention getting the chance to personally invite her. Since the drama was a public performance at the town square, it wouldn't be too surprising for it to be seen by a peddler who might have come from Longsong Stronghold, and this could be given as the reason for this the news to have reached his ear – doing it this

way, he won't expose his knights who are disguised as serfs.

As soon as Petrov was ready to have one of his attendants draft the text, a Knight rushed into the hall, and hurriedly said, "My Lord, we have a message from the guards at the East Gate, a team of knights are nearing the stronghold!"

"Knights? Were they able to tell who must have sent them?" He suddenly stood.

"The other side is holding up a flag with a tower and two pikes on it, Sir," the Knight replied, "In case they aren't pretenders, they must be from the new King's forces."

Chapter 192 - Under The Curtain Of The Night

About 50 people had come, they were all dressed in armor which was sparkling in the sun. Standing in lines of 8 with flags on all sides, three of them displayed the insignia of the royal family: the gray tower with the two pikes. Additionally, on one side there was a flag with a tower and a horse's head on top. Carving through the memories at the back of his mind, he remembered that this was likely the symbol of the Hawes family of the northern border.

One of the cavalrymen stepped out of the ranks and yelled: "I am Lehman Hawes, the messenger of King Timothy. With me, I have brought the resolution of the King, pull down the drawbridge."

"Your certificate?" Petrov stretched his head forward and asked loudly.

Hearing his question, the cavalryman took a bow and arrow from his back, tied a piece of paper to the arrow and shot it directly to on top of the city wall.

One of his guards immediately went over and picked up the arrow for Petrov. When he unfolded the parchment, he saw some faint crisscrossing golden threads embedded at the bottom of the document, and there at the lower right corner was the seal of the royal family, which indicated that he was indeed the new King's messenger.

Seeing this, Petrov took a deep breath and shouted, "Lower the

bridge and open the gate.” He could already roughly guess the content of the so-called resolution – it was undoubtedly related to Roland Wimbledon. Since the other party wasn’t a fraud, they also had no reason to refuse the new King’s envoy. Otherwise it was equivalent to declaring the new King, and the Kingdom of Graycastle as their enemy. And in case this news were to spread out, the other families would certainly come to target the Honeysuckle territory without any hesitation, and the currently suppressed undercurrent would instantly rebound.

However, since Timothy had only sent 50 people to inquire about the situation in the Western Territory, one of the Prince’s speculation had been confirmed – the new King, at present, was unable to rule over the Western Territory.

Since the Prince, His Royal Highness, was able to repel the Duke’s coalition who had more than a 1000 soldier, I’m afraid that these fifty people can only return without having any achievement.

Of course, His Highness has to be informed about this development as soon as possible.

Thinking until here, he called the Knight from before, “Westeros, take three short-tailed horses with you, interchange them during the ride, so that you can reach Border Town as early as possible. When you’re there tell His Highness that Timothy’s men have come.”

“As you bid,” Westeros nodded.

As the Knight turned around and left, Petrov sighed. “Let’s go and meet the new King’s envoy.”

...

When Petrov appeared at the city gate, with the exception of the ten people riding at the front, whose spirits seemed to be trembling with excitement, the rest of the Cavaliers all seemed a little sluggish, they were sitting with a crooked body on their horses, as if they could fall off any time.

“Welcome, Sir Lehman,” Petrov welcomed him with a nod. “I’m the stronghold manager belonging to the Honeysuckle Family, Petrov Hull.”

The word ‘stronghold manager’ left a bad aftertaste in his mouth. If he had really been in charge of the Western Border, being the Duke of the stronghold, he would never have had to salute towards an envoy. He wouldn’t even need to greet him at the gate. Instead, he could just stay inside the Lord’s castle, waiting for the other party to come to him.

“I have heard of your name at the Cold Wind Range, ‘Acting Duke’.” Lehman dismounted and walked over with a smile. “The Western Border is indeed a strange territory, even after assembling a vast army, Duke Ryan actually couldn’t conquer such a small town. Moreover, he even lost his own life, which is a rare circumstance for the Kingdom of Graycastle. Of course, for the Honeysuckle Family, this must have been good news.”

Petrov automatically ignored the irony coming from his words, “Are your men alright? They look to be a little... unwell.”

“Don’t mind them,” Lehman glanced backward, “They probably haven’t acclimatized themselves after rushing through the whole journey, they will be better after some rest. To be honest, this region is just too hot.”

“It’s only because the North is too cold,” Since the other person seemed to not care about the matter, Petrov was too lazy to pay attention further to the subject. “I’m wondering why sir envoy has come from the Cold Wind Range, rather than from King’s City.”

“That is because His Majesty Timothy Wimbledon is currently in the Northern Territory,” Lehman answered bluntly. “Duke Essie thought had thought he could take advantage of the weakened state of the Northern Border Guards to instigate a rebellion. After being suspected of starting a revolution, King Timothy had no other choice than to put down the revolt.”

Rebellion? Perot frowned, that does not meet with common sense. Although the Border Guards were put together of Knights and mercenaries from all over the kingdom, most of the members were still the Duke’s own men. So how could it be that he had substantial losses created by the rebellion? Remembering the letter within Duke Ryan had written about his plans to annex the North, Petrov created a bad image within his mind... Could it be that Timothy Wimbledon had the same kind of idea?

“That being the case, what is the King’s current decision?”

“He has issued a recall order,” Lehman stated, “His Majesty sent me to see if the Western Territory has also sunken into a state of chaos, caused by war. If I remember correctly, prior to the Months of Demons, the King had sent a recall order to Roland Wimbledon, but until today he still hasn’t returned to King’s City.”

“The instruments should have been forwarded to the stronghold five months ago, but unlike the previous Lords, Lord Roland didn’t choose to return to the stronghold and take refuge here during the Months of Demons,” Petrov paused. “He decided to instead stay inside Border Town and lead his people against the demonic beasts. So, for that reason he couldn’t immediately set out to King’s City and follow the King’s orders.

“By now the end of the Months of Demons had been almost three months ago,” Lehman didn’t waver in his duty. “The King has sent me to escort the Prince back to King’s City.”

“When will you leave for Border Town?”

“We will set out tomorrow morning.”

Traveling at a regular pace, they should arrive at Border Town in three days, while my Knight will move through day and night, and should be able to deliver the message after only one night and day. This way His Royal Highness should have enough time to prepare to deal with them. I, Petrov, can only do so much.

When the group reached the stronghold’s barracks, Petrov

stopped, “This is the place where the Duke’s Knights were stationed, so staying here you should get a good rest, dinner will be sent later to you. As for Sir Lehman,” Petrov looked at Lehman Hawes, “there will be a hearty dinner prepared for you, please be sure to attend.”

“Thank you for your generosity, Sir Petrov,” the latter laughed.

After dinner, when Lehman returned to camp and stepped into the central tent, he was immediately surrounded by several people.

“What’s the situation?” He asked.

“We are surrounded on all sides by people who are keeping a close watch over us. They have also stationed around a hundred troops at the gates, but most of them don’t possess a whole armor, so they should belong to the city patrol,” one of his men reported. “It seems that the Lord doesn’t trust us.”

“At least it appeared that our intelligence was correct, the information I gathered at the banquet also confirmed this point,” Lehman spoke in a hushed tone. “After the Duke was defeated, most of the Knights were arrested and brought to Border Town, so there aren’t many Knight’s left for them to use in combat.”

Before he had arrived here, he had gathered detailed intelligence about the current situation in Longsong Stronghold. The task given by His Majesty was very simple, which was, to discover the

reasons for the Duke's loss, and then to take the appropriate measures to take gain control over the Western Territory as quickly as possible.

“What’s with those who took that medicine...?”

“They will soon reach their limit,” said the other, “as long as we give them pills, they will do anything.”

The messenger group was also only a pretext, of their team of fifty, the numbers of real Knights were only counted at thirteen, the other were mercenaries disguised as knights. Under the influence of the church’s pills, they were more obedient than the loyalest of hounds, while at the same time being even more ferocious than demonic beasts. They were also the key to Lehman’s plan in capturing the gate. According to his plan, a 1,500 people strong militia were slowly nearing the stronghold and as long as they opened the gates, the city would fall into their hands.

“Hand out the pills, then have ten men stay behind to deal with the patrol and send the others to the East Gate.” Lehman finally gave his orders.

Chapter 193 - Castle Bathroom

The theater performance was a great success. Within the last two weeks “Cinderella” had been performed three times, many of the citizens had even seen it more than once. If the first performance was the needed propaganda and announcement to attract so many people to come watch, the next two plays were completely self-sustaining. There were even citizens who came to the City Hall and asked when the fourth performance would be held.

Getting such a respond, Roland was naturally overjoyed; they were all so completely attracted to the story that almost no one raised any objections as to why Cinderella got help from a witch. Wait until “The rooster crows at Midnight” gets played next month, which was almost a special performance for the impoverished commoners, it was still unknown how the serfs would view the treatment and assistance of the witches during the drama.

Another thing that pleased Roland was that the crew had settled down in town and even accepted the existence of the witches – after the third performance, Irene took the initiative to find Roland, and had asked him from where the unexpected “sound accompaniment” had come, so Roland then introduced Echo to her.

With Nightingale’s secret observation, they discovered that although Irene was clearly surprised, she didn’t show any resentment or disgust. After she regained her composure, she seemed to be very curious and peppered Echo with many questions, even making her demonstrate her magical sound several times over. The result being that Echo soon joined the theater

group, becoming the master of music who was orchestrating from behind the scenes – in order to avoid the possibility of any accidents, Irene alone paired up with Echo when they did a sound rehearsal, withholding it from the knowledge of the cast. There was no doubt that the musical accompaniment would soon reach new heights at the upcoming performance.

Another matter that made him jubilant, was that the castle would soon step into the era of tap water.

The towering water tower stood tall and upright in the castle backyard. Its body and framework was made out of welded iron, giving it a triangular shape. Attached to the top of the tower — with a diameter of two meters and a height of three meters— was an iron bucket. The water valve within the bucket made it very convenient to control the water level. The tower was welded by Anna and afterward covered by a rust-proof coating by Soraya, and finally, with the help of Hummingbird's magic, they eliminated most of the weight in order to install it on the previous erected cement base.

Due to the height of the castle, the water tower in the castle backyard was even higher than Redwater River's river bank, with a height of 12 meters it was almost level with the castle's peak. In order to prevent the tower from collapsing, Roland surrounded the tower by a wall and in this way connected the tower with the castle.

The steam engine was set up outside the backyard and used to supply the water tower with water by pumping up water from the well in the castle's back garden. Taking a closer look, it could be

seen that it was already the third generation of the steam engine, with the biggest improvement being the great reduction of the working noise.

At each connection point of the steam engine, a spacer was equipped – the light blue spacer was drawn with Soraya's sky coloring, making it soft while also being very though, significantly reducing the machine's vibrational noise. The inside of the cylinder and the piston's edge were covered with a grass coloring, which lessened the leakage while at the same time also improved the operational efficiency. Components that were prone to tremors, such as the exhaust pipe, had been entirely replaced with coated hoses.

In order to prevent that the steamer from getting scorched and drenched by sun and rain, as well as for further noise reduction, Roland built a small house around it, and had Soraya coat all of the inner walls with a honeycomb design, which was used like a porous sound-absorption material. The practical test showed that even during the night, the noise of the machine would be so faint that the people sleeping inside wouldn't be woken up.

However, Roland's attempt to automatically feed the steam engine failed. He originally envisaged that the steam engine would be regulated by a fly ball which would control the valve in the wood box. As the steam pressure dropped, the fly ball was meant to open the valve, so that the firewood in the wood box would roll into the furnace, but that way the regulator would have to do a lot of work, otherwise with the weight of the fly ball alone it couldn't drive the valve.

After a lot of deliberation, Roland finally decided to give up. At the beginning, the wood box would have to be filled to the maximum, and when it was used up it had to be filled again by a workforce anyway, in that case would be better to arrange for staff to just fill the water tank with water each day.

The final step was to install the water system into the castle – which included faucets, showers, pipes and the corresponding drainpipes.

The castle wasn't like the brick houses of the newly constructed district, the holes, roofs and walls built out of stone caused the transformation of the castle to be very inconvenient. So this step had taken nearly a week, but in order to live a happy life, Roland personally directed Karl to change one room on the second and the third floor into a bathroom.

For this, Soraya's new ability once again played a vital role, after the drainage pipes on the ground were paved with cement; she painted a thin layer of grass over the ground, not only making it waterproof, but in this way walking in the bathroom was like also as comfortable as walking on grassland. When she'd done this, Roland directly permitted her to coat the whole room. Turning the ceiling into a blue sky and clouds, while on the surrounding walls far-off valley and grassy areas could be seen and the walls of the bathtub became crystal clear, just like a jewel.

On the day at which the water system was working, the Prince called all of the witches to the bathroom to let them finally experience for themselves this wondrous achievement.

The water tank in the backyard was filled with water, so when he turned on the faucet, the water rushed out of the pipe.

“From now on, there is no longer the need to get the water from the well,” Roland proudly proclaimed. “It is not necessary to use the same bathwater for three days. You only have to stand under the shower and pull the lever.”

“Where does the water come from?” Lightning stuck out her tongue and tasted the water, “It’s sweet.”

From below Lighting, Macy stretched out her head and followed her example, “Very sweet goo!”

Seeing a third one trying to taste the water, Roland stopped Nana, “Those who want to drink water, can only do so after it has been boiled. The water from this can only be used for hand washing and bathing.”

“This is... the siphon principle, right?” Anna looked to Roland, her lake like blue eyes flashed with intelligence.

“What is that?” Hummingbird asked as she raised her hand.

Under Scroll’s teaching, every witch in the class had gotten used to the habit of raising their hand whenever they had a question.

” ‘Elementary Physics’ says when the level in two containers is not equal, and if the two tanks are connected by a pipe, no matter

what shape the pipe has, under the force of gravity the liquid will always level out.” Anna explained what she remembered, “Our current position is lower than the water tower, so the water will continue to flow to here.”

“That’s entirely correct,” Roland praised. Being able to link the learned knowledge with the reality, really was worthy of a talented person.

“What about this?” Nightingale asked, curiously pointing to the shower, “Why does it have so many holes in the bottom?”

Roland turned the valve open, letting thin water droplets spray out, “It’s for the purpose of making it easier for people to take a bath. Just by standing under the shower, an individual can easily clean their body.”

“So that was the reason you were rolling around in the castle this whole week, to make it more comfortable to take a bath?” Lily curled her lips and whispered, “It’s really worthy of the luxurious life of a Lord.”

“Lily!” Scroll scolded with a frown.

“Never mind,” Roland waved his hand, indicating that he did not mind her words, “The pursuit of enjoyment is one of the biggest sources of human progress, and I am not an exception to that.”

Chapter 194 - Lily

Not long after the Prince returned to his office, Scroll, following after him, also entered the room.

“Your Highness, I’m sorry, Lily, that child... it was not on purpose.”

“I don’t mind what she said,” he smiled, “After all, she is still a little girl.”

“Only His Highness is so tolerant of us,” Scroll sighed. “At first, she wasn’t like this, but after she was deceived, it is hard for her to believe in ordinary people again.”

“Are you speaking about something that happened to her before she joined the Witch Cooperation Association?” Roland asked. “If I remember it correctly, it was one year ago that she had joined you.”

“You already know that I can feel the existence of magic, the closer I come to the source the more intense the feeling will become. Though it is not like Nightingale’s sense, that allows her to directly see the shape and color of the magic, I can atleast use it to detect new witches. So whenever we reached a new town, I will go to the local shelters or orphanages and pretend to be an aristocratic wife who wants to adopt a child, looking if I may be able to find an awakened sister,” she paused, “I found Lili in a shelter in a remote village, but when I expressed my intention of wanting to adopt her, I was rejected by the owner of the shelter,

who declared that he would only sell the girls after they have become adults.”

“Why?” Roland already had his doubt. The last chance for a girl to awaken as a witch is on her day of adulthood, is that the reason?

“We were also surprised at that time, so we had Nightingale sneak into the shelter and search for books, records, and related information. Fortunately, the shelter was far from town so we could stay there for a long time.

“With Nightingale’s ability, why didn’t you just take Lili away, with her ability it shouldn’t have been too difficult, right?”

“It wouldn’t have been difficult,” Scroll nodded in response, “With the exception of the God’s Stone of Retaliation that the operator wore, there was no other stone within the whole shelter, but we still couldn’t do that, after all, there was a precedent for that.”

“What precedent?” The Prince filled a cup of tea and handed it to Scroll.

“Thank you,” Scroll took the teacup. “At first, as soon as we detected a witch, we would take her by force, but after what happened in the Seawind Region we had to change our way of thinking. They thought of us as evil, so when we brought them to the camp of our Witch Cooperation Association, they wouldn’t listen to us or accept our explanation and would instead try to attack us. In the end, two of our sisters died, they were killed by

Cara's magical snake, 'Death'. And since then, we would always carefully observe the witch over a period of time, and determine her situation and get to know her beliefs before we would take action. In case we were chased by the Church and had to act urgently, we... had no other choice than to give up on them."

"So, the meeting between Nightingale and Wendy wasn't by accident?"

"Of course not," Scroll took another sip of her tea, smiled and shook her head, "The interval of becoming aware of Nightingales existence until Wendy made contact with her, more than one month's time had passed; during which we also recruited other sisters, such as Red Pepper and Windseeker..." Speaking until here her expression turned blank, "Unfortunately, they are now buried in the wild lands. At that time, if we had only chosen to settle in Border Town, they could still be alive today."

Roland also felt quite sorry for them. If the Witch Cooperation Association had decided to settle down in Border Town and had brought their more than 40 witches with them, I think it is entirely possible that we would already have entered modern life by now.

"But right now we weren't speaking about them," Scroll took a deep breath, "we were talking about Lily. During the search of the shelter as well as following the host's tracks, we discovered an astonishing fact – the small country house was neither a real shelter, nor was it an establishment to screen for witches."

"Then what was its purpose?"

“Its only purpose was to satisfy the owner’s selfish desire.” Even for a person with a good self-control like Scroll, when speaking these word her facial expression became somewhat dreary, “Every week the owner would go to the slums of Redwater City, abducting those vagrant girls, and deceive them by saying that he was a kind and selfless aristocrat, who had opened up a shelter in the suburb. Furthermore, his shelter would often be visited by powerful nobles who were looking for girls to be adopted as daughters. As long as they were selected, they would no longer need to worry about food and clothing for the rest of their life. Of course, not everyone would be deceived by his sweet words, but... after ten years of running, in addition to the 66 who still lived in the shelter, there were still several hundreds of names written in his books.”

“So many?” Roland frowned. “But you said that it was not such a big shelter.”

“Hundreds of them now only remain as names in those books. Most of them were already... dead,” she whispered. “During the last ten years, he had discovered three witches, who were all sold to the Church. While the other girls –who had better appearance– got dressed up nicely and then sold to people, who had a need of them. However, those for those who no one had any interest in were killed and buried in the woods behind the shelter.

“...” Hearing her story, the Prince didn’t know how to respond. At that moment he suddenly felt from his back, someone gently place their hands on his shoulders.

“The chances that a girl awakens to become a witch is not high,

so after reducing the living cost, within all the years, he hadn't earned more than 20 gold royals, based on the data we were able to gather from his accounting book. Because of those 20 gold royals, more than 300 women had lost their life in the woods, filling the pit in the woods with corpses.

"When Cara had interrogated him why he did this, he'd said, that it had never been his intention to earn gold royals, that was only to keep the shelter running. Because of this, he only sold them when they became adults, after all, a witch could be sold at a much higher price than an ordinary woman. His only goal was to enjoy the power to decide about life and death and to feel the pleasure of forcefully taking it away; giving him the feeling as if he had become their King.

"Afterwards, Cara killed him in anger, and when we later wanted to dispel the girls from their belief, most of them only glared at us as if we had taken away their chance of being adopted by a noble."

At first the same was true for Lily, and only after Cara took her to the grove behind the building, where she then saw her friend was buried – a month ago the owner had lied and said that she was one of those lucky girls who were selected by a noble and with that could leave the shelter. Soon after seeing the several corpses in the already stinking pit, Lily threw up and turned into a total mess, fainting and falling into Cara's arms. Later when she awoke her look had become stupefied, without any trace of spirit left in her eyes, she was only later under Wendy's care that she was slowly able to recover. Since then, Lily is full of vigilance and distrust to ordinary people, especially the aristocracy. "Scroll explained, "But I believe that she will be able to slowly change her point of view. After all, you are also a member of the nobility."

“So, that’s the reason,” in his heart Roland secretly sighed, after experiencing this kind of event, being able to once more cheer up, her spirit must be considerably tough.

Scroll went over to the kettle and filled up their two cups. Afterward, the room was silent for a long time until she said: “Your Highness, I have a question I want to ask you.”

“What question?” Seeing the serious expression on Scroll’s face, Roland got started.

“Nightingale, are you there?”

“Well,” Nightingale said, “Do you need me to leave?”

“No... you already know about it anyway,” Scroll shook her head, “so you can accompany me this time, and be my witness.”

“You previously said, that you are willing to take a witch as your wife and marry her, but I do not know if you know, that a witch is unable to conceive a child.” She paused, and after a moment she finally asked, “Your Highness, even if it is like this, is there still no change to your original intention?”

Chapter 195 - Answer

Roland at first doubted whether what he'd heard was true, only after a while was he able to say, "What?"

Scroll bit her lip, but then repeated what she had said once more.

This time he was convinced that this wasn't the result of a hearing problem. Was that also the initial reason why the witches cared so much about marriage? "Are you certain that witches cannot have children? Does it come... from that specified source, which lead to the known mistake? For example, the same as what lead to the Holy Mountain previously."

"I would have hoped so too," she sighed. "Unfortunately, many cases have already confirmed this point. Whether it was between an ordinary man and a witch who got along or by forced intercourse, there has been no time that the Witch Cooperation Association had heard of a witch falling pregnant."

"Reproductive isolation"... was the first word which emerged in Roland's mind. Can it be that the witches have really completely exceeded the ordinary, becoming a new kind of human species, which is unable to give birth to a descendant with our old humankind? Or, can it be because of the magic power gathered within their body, which results in this phenomenon?

But now isn't the time to get to the heart of the problem, he thought, the important part is what this implies. Will this knowledge be a hindrance for myself if I want to marry a witch?

The first person Roland thought of was Anna.

Although he couldn't deny that he would regret it if he couldn't have children with Anna, his wish to raise a child with Anna was based on his affection for her, so not being able to have a child with her wouldn't reduce his affection. For a person with a modern soul, and for him, having blood relation with his descendants is of far less importance than it was to the people of the past. As a separate living individual, he does not regard his child as the continuation of his life – the latter could neither inherit his thoughts nor inherit his memories. Instead, they were an entirely independent person.

So, looking at it from an emotional point of view, he could accept that a witch cannot have a child.

Then only the real obstacle would be – the need for an heir. However, looking at the history this was still not a thorny matter, he just has to establish an empire that doesn't need an heir, and how to achieve this, there were options he could choose from, but which one he would pick he could slowly decide on later .

Looking at the big picture, Roland surprisingly discovered, that this was good news for him.

He and Nightingale had already spoken several nights and pondered on this question, how to build a social framework which allows witches and ordinary people to peacefully coexistence and progress together. Right now, even with the God's Stone of

Retaliation, as long as they had enough time, witches and their offspring would always form a more powerful community – even in the case where science and technology allowed an ordinary person to use magic. Even then, it couldn't make up for the witches increased intelligence, memory, comprehensive speed and their overall leading edge.

But now he was told that witches are unable to give birth. This significantly avoided the problem of forming witch clans, closing the gap between witches and ordinary people, giving him the hope to one day see people and witches work together and advance hand in hand.

Perhaps the time he had been lost in his thoughts was too long, no matter what, Nightingale couldn't bear it any longer and squeezed his arm.

When Roland returned from within his thoughts, he reassuringly patted the back of her hand and cleared his throat and said. “The way I have thought before is still the way I think now.”

“...” For a moment Scroll was frozen, “What?”

The hand on top of his arm also instantly grasped firmly.

Seeing their reactions, Roland couldn't suppress his laughter, previous it was he who had thought that he had misheard them, and now it was them who thought so? He coughed twice and then reassuring said: “I still think the same – I'm willing to marry a witch and take her as my wife.”

...

When Scroll left the room she wore a very strange expression; it looked as if she was perfectly contented and yet she was also carrying a somewhat sad look, leaving behind a confused Roland.

Needing an explanation he turned around he asked, “Is she okay?”

The one he spoke to didn’t answer, she only looked at him with a smile, which together with the outside sunshine shining upon her white face gave her a gentle, bright and beautiful appearance causing others’ hearts’ to beat faster.

“Alright,” Roland moved his line of sight away from her, “It seems you are in a pretty good mood.”

At this moment, the voice from outside the door traveled over, “Your Highness, one of Longsong Stronghold’s Knights has arrived, he claims to have crucial news for you.”

“Take him to the reception hall; I will meet him there.”

When the Prince walked into the hall, the knight immediately stepped over and then went down on his knees, “Lord Petrov has sent me to tell you, that an envoy sent by Timothy Wimbledon has arrived at Longsong Stronghold.”

“Envoy?” Roland mused. “How many people have arrived?”

“Altogether there are about 50 people.”

It seems that they are just a group which wants to persuade us to give up, he thought, simply a diplomatic strategie, nothing which should be painful or itching for me, “When did they come?”

“Yesterday morning,” the Knight lowered his voice, “Lord Petrov gave me the order to inform you as soon as possible.”

Merely a day and a night, I’m afraid he had hurried all through the night while holding up a torch, “Thank you, I have put you to a lot of trouble, rest for a day before you return.” Roland looked to the guards and told them, “First give him a gold royal as reward and then take him to the inn.”

When the Knight had left the hall, Roland wanted to put the matter aside, after all, a team of just 50 people could never become a threat to Border Town. In case they wanted to negotiate, he would merely allow the single leader to enter. However, since Petrov treated this situation so carefully, it might be better to grasp the situation himself and to know the whereabouts of the envoy.

Thinking until here, he called for Lightning and Maggie, giving them the order to fly together to the stronghold and examine the situation.

A double-hour later, the two witches had completed their investigation and returned to the castle.

“There was nothing to see,” Lightning reported. “We didn’t see a group of 50 knights on the road. Actually, we didn’t see even one lone knight.

“Haven’t seen anyone, goo!” Maggie confirmed.

It seems after they had reached a big city, traveling such a long distance, they were in need to first have some fun for themselves and to ease their tired body. “Before the envoy arrive here,” Roland ordered, “every day you two will fly along the way and check if you can discover anything.” He paused, “Oh that’s right, how far are you with the map?”

“Probably she has already put together several hundred pieces, they are enough to almost fill Soraya’s whole room,” Lightning explained. “By now she had moved the map to the backyard, do you want to take a look?”

“Alright,” Roland laughed.

The castle’s backyard had been turned into a botanical garden, ever since Sean had brought back the seeds from Port of Clearwater, Leaves had created even more fantastic oddities of every description. In order to save the land and place for flower beds, Leaves had put up a wooden frame in the sky, so that many plants grew and twisted around the frame like a grapevine, some of them even climbed half of the castle wall. This was the reason why

the wall behind the castle hung full with grapes, apples, wheat and sugar cane, and whenever the witches had some free time, they would gather in the backyard and picked up some fruit and sugar cane from the wall to eat. Unfortunately, these crops could only grow with the help of Leaves' magic, and with this, could only be regarded as an unsuccessful test.

The map which was a mosaic, pieced together by many parchments, was placed at the center of the yard, reaching a size of five to six square meters.

"Here we are," Lightning announced, and then put an arm around Roland's waist, beginning to slowly float into the sky until they were hovering over the map. "Do you see the palm-sized brown square? From high up in the air, Border Town looks exactly like that."

"The blue pieces East and South... are they the sea?"

"Yes, but you have to climb over the mountains to reach there."

Roland felt a cold shiver running through his heart, if we say that it was still normal if the wildlands were ten times more vast than the Kingdom of Graycastle, he still hadn't expected, that when he had the complete map in front of him, the Western Territory would actually seem so small. In front of them was the Impassable Mountain Range and behind them the sea, just like they were sandwiched between a natural barrier and the marginal zone. No... not only the Western Territory, when he completed the undrawn parts of the map with his mind, in the case where he thought of the Impassable Mountain Range as a wall splitting of the mainland,

then the Kingdom of Graycastle, no, the whole “mainland” itself, would be nothing more than a small piece of land behind the wall.

Chapter 196 - The Calamity Of The Church

Lehman and his knights rode their horses through the streets of Longsong Stronghold.

Now, after the fighting had come to an end, the city's residents were all hiding in their houses and keeping their doors shut; not even half a shadow could be seen on the streets, making a cold and cheerless image.

"Sir Lehman, I hope that your hand is alright," The "Shield" Knight, Sir Levin asked.

"It's not a problem," Lehman Hawes shrugged his shoulders, "at least I can still move it," however, that small movement was already enough to make him wrinkle his brows.

Last night's seizure of the gate had went smoothly, only twenty guards had been stationed at the East Gate, they never expected that the enemy's attack would come from the inside.

Even though they were able to sound the horn, the reinforcements had still needed a quarter of an hour to arrive, by then, the 15 mercenaries, enhanced with the pills, had already reached the top of the gate; killing one guard after another and thus allowing Lehman with this Knights to open the gate. Under the darkness of night, Lehman hadn't noticed the side door in the city wall from which two knights had suddenly appeared, the one armed with a hammer immediately throwing himself at Lehman.

In order to lessen the swinging power of the hammer, he had to take the hammer's blow before it reached his waist, under such a hasty situation Lehman was merely able to use his arm to resist, and almost at the same time using his sword with his other hand to pierce into the guard's waist. Affected by the impact of the fatal blow, the incoming hammer lost a lot of its strength, but it was still strong enough to leave behind a noticeable dent on his arm's armor piece.

At first, Lehman hadn't felt much pain, however, after they had conquered the gate, he noticed that he had problems with lifting his arm, when he unlocked the armor he discovered that his forearm had already swollen up like a rolling pin.

"I hope there's an analgesic herb in the church," Levin said.
"They often prepare some strange things."

"Like those pills for example." Duane, another Knight who happens to be near, said.

Soon, the knights reached the church's gate, and a team of around 100 militia could already be seen waiting for them, showing off a look full of desire.

"Hand out some pills to them," Lehman dismounted from his horse. When he saw that everyone had taken the pills, he turned around, climbed the stairs and led his team to the main hall.

"Halt," the two gatekeepers shouted, "This is Holy Land, no one is allowed to bring their weapons inside!"

Levin pulled out his weapon and placed it in both his hands to hand it over, “We are aware of that, this should be given to you, right?” When the believer stretched out his hands, ready to receive the weapon, Levin suddenly and masterfully grasped the sword’s hilt then slashed his sword upwards, sending the believer’s two hands falling to the ground.

“Ah -” even before the believer’s sorrowful cry could fully emerge from his throat, the Knight had already pierced the tip of his sword through it

Even though Levin’s nickname was Shield, his quick sword draw was truly unmatched.

After the other believer’s throat was cut open by Duane, Lehman kicked open the door and expressionless entered the hall.

“Who are you?” A middle-aged man wearing a blue-and-white ritual gown walked up to them not showing a trace of fear as he faced the bloody sword which was pointed at him, “Daring to have the impertinence to break into the church! Children, grab them!”

Lehman sneered, right now, most people were at home, so there were no more than 20-30 believers inside the church. Having to face his battle-hardened knights, their rebellion would only be a doomed cause.

Not waiting for his order, with a devilish laugh Duane pulled his sword, cutting down one of the believers that was rushing over.

Other people also quickly joined the battle, turning the church into a scene of chaos. Seeing the situation, the priest shouted, “Children, take the holy medicine so that God will give you the power to defeat the mob!”

His Majesty Timothy’s guess was right, Lehman thought, they really did have pills stored in here! Merely to see how the believer’s eyes suddenly turn red through and through, and on the believer’s face blue veins were blossoming. With those drugs, an ordinary person could break through the human body’s limit of strength and speed. Furthermore, the narrower the terrain, the more challenging it would be to deal with them. Unfortunately for them, they aren’t the only ones who possess those things, he thought, now have a taste of your own medicine.

“Get out!” he yelled, “make the militia fight against them!”

Hearing his shout, the militia behind him couldn’t wait to swallow those two colored pills and madly rush forward to fight against the believer. Seeing all this, the priest’s face finally lost his color, “Why do you also have the...!”

“Holy Medicine?” Holding his sword in his hand, Lehman bypassed the group of fighting people, closing in towards his counterpart. “They were a present from your Church, and if we hadn’t to face your obstacles, His Majesty Timothy would have already unified the Kingdom of Graycastle.”

“His Majesty?” The priest’s eyes became wide, “you are Timo- ”

With a grunting sound his voice stopped, the Knight's sword pierced the man's chest, penetrating his heart and lung.

Soon after, the unequal fight ended and there were more than 20 believers slaughtered with their bodies spread all over the ground. The further the drug efficacy vanished, the heavier the soldiers began to breathe so when they were finally able to sit down, they were so satisfied that they didn't mind to sit in the blood which was endlessly flowing over the ground.

Lehman's arm also became heavier; just his previous sword stroke was enough to make him experience a tearing pain. Sometimes, he also wanted to swallow that black pill, let himself ignore the physical fatigue and suffering, but whenever he saw the pill's ugly side effects, this idea would immediately vanish.

Lehman had a profound understanding of the two pills that were sold by the church. For a healthy person, the pill would only be effective for three times. While the first time it was still effective for a quarter hour, the duration would decrease with every following dose, at the same time forming a heavy dependence on it. If you were unable to take the medicine for a long time, the body would gradually decline until finally, death.

Taking advantage of this characteristic, he let every one of the soldiers eat a pill to unify the militia, in this way forcing them to obey his orders. The craving for the drug could turn even the weakest farmer into a bloodthirsty beast. Now, after the hundred people had taken the pill for the second time, they could only be used one more time.

But... even if the drug is taken after the third dosage, it will only slow the process, it still cannot reverse its damage. In other words, as soon as one takes the first pill, it is equivalent to setting their first foot into the coffin. Of course, this was something he would never explain to them.

There is no doubt that the two-color secret medicine is a conspiracy of the Church, His Majesty Timothy is apparently aware of this, and because of this, he prohibited all of the Knights from taking it. However, it is also a weapon which can be used to unify the kingdom, or... rather, must be used. Without it, His Majesty cannot overcome Garcia Wimbledon, who also has those pills with her.

When His Majesty mentioned this matter to him for the first time, Lehman couldn't believe it. He just couldn't understand why the Church would support two members of the royal family who were competing against each other for the throne. But after a series of unforeseen events, he had to acknowledge His Majesty's judgment. And now, with the Church in the Western Territory also in possession of the pills, he no longer had any doubt – the Church doesn't intend to help any of the Princes or Princess to the throne; no, they want the entire Kingdom of Graycastle for themselves.

“We found the pills in the basement, there are four large boxes, with thousands in all of them.” After thoroughly plundering the Church, Levin excitedly came back to report, “There were also gold royals, jewelry, and many silk fabrics, all of which should be the donations given by believers.”

“What can be taken, take away and what can’t be taken, burn,” Lehman instructed. “In case someone asks, Roland Wimbledon was the one who did all of this. We’re just helping the Church to suppress his rebellion.”

Because we still have to rely on the Church to get the secret medicine, so, for now, we can’t burn all of our bridges with them. It is better if we blame the Prince for it, since he can already be considered dead. In order to prevent the Church from becoming suspicion, His Majesty himself had stayed in the North, pretending to comply with their fake instruction. He’d only secretly sent out a small number of Knights, who recruited a large number of militia to capture the Western Territory.

Nowadays, all the forces of the Church are concentrated in the Wolfsheart Kingdom, so we have to unite the Kingdom of Graycastle as soon as possible, only then will we have the strength to resist an attack of the Church. His Majesty Timothy believes that it is only a matter of time before the Church attacks the Kingdom of Graycastle. So until then, we have to store and collect as many pills as possible. At the same time, he has also ordered King’s City Alchemy Association to research its ingredients, so that they could become able to imitate it.

Now that we have the pills in our hand, there is only one task left – completely eliminating Roland Wimbledon.

Chapter 197 - Preparing For The Enemy

On the next morning, Roland was informed that Lightning, on one of her routine patrols, had discovered that there was a large force slowly closing in on them.. .

“What, they have more than 1000 people?” Hearing such a large number startled Roland, wasn’t I told that it was only a 50-people strong envoy?

“En, goo,” Maggie added, “there aren’t many people that are riding on horses, only six!”

“The people who are walking... how are they dressed and equipped?”

“They seem ordinary, most of them don’t possess a helmet or armor. They’re wearing normal linen clothes instead,” Lightning reported, “Furthermore, they all have different kinds of weapons, but there are hundreds of people who are carrying short spears on their back.”

With such a poor level of equipment, does that mean they are civilians or serfs who were forced into serving? Roland questioned this, during this era they had no specialized militia training, this was also the reason why the militia usually only belonged to the logistic team and handled the food and supplies of the Knights. While they were also sometimes used as cannon fodder, as a target for the enemy’s arrows.

If Timothy wants to use military force to dispose of me, it should be impossible that he doesn't know about the explosive fight between Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. That time, Duke Ryan's coalition of more than two hundred Knights could not even touch the town's edge, not to mention that crowd of mercenaries who would have to run on both of their legs. Knowing about the fight's process and eventual result, yet still wanting to attack Border Town, this can only mean that they have confidence that they can break through the intensive row of gunfire.

Roland could not help but think of the church's pills.

Previous he had already guessed that the Church was supporting Garcia and himself at the same time, but whether they also favored Timothy was still unknown. If that troop was in possession of those pills, the situation would be entirely different.

For a short time they would be able to reach the speed of a running horse, while also not being afraid of pain, meaning, the gun line would actually face an impact of more than 1000 "Knights", and as long as one person managed to rush into the lines, they could cause significant casualties to the First Army.

Fortunately, the First Army now was no longer the First Army of two months ago.

With the revolving rifle, although until now only 100 had been replaced, the firepower they could deliver went far beyond that of the previous flintlock army, especially after he'd provided the gunners with a special ammunition loader. As soon as they enter into a scope of 300 meters, the enemy would have to face a

constant stream of attacks.

Furthermore, after the fight with the stronghold, the artillery force has also been expanded. From its original size of four to its current size 20 groups, each was equipped with a modified version of the 12-pounder field cannon, doubling its range, its effective range was increased to over a kilometer.

However, Roland soon thought of another problem.

“Have you noticed if anyone of those soldiers that were walking was wearing a God’s Stone of Retaliation?

“I didn’t dare to get so close,” Lightning said, then pointed at Maggy. “But this fellow, after she had turned into her eagle form she could see them many times better than I could.”

But the latter also shook her head, “Haven’t seen, they might have hidden it in their clothes, Goo!”

“If it’s like this...” for a moment Roland pondered about it, “How about you take Nightingale with you. If you only carry one person while flying, you can still reach a height of ten meters, right? You will follow the Redwater River, Maggie will fly in front of you and take responsible of being on guard, as for the possibility of coming across a ship, Nightingale will step into her world of fog,” he said, then he looked at Nightingale. “When you are close enough to the enemy, you will observe them from distance. Find out if the troops are carrying God’s Stone of Retaliations, however, without my permission, you will not attack.”

“Yes,” Nightingale and Lightning said simultaneously.

When the three were ready to go, Roland stopped them one more time, “Remember, safety first, the most important thing is that you protect yourself.”

“No problem,” Nightingale said with a wink and smile.

When the witches had left, Roland felt a little uneasy, wasn’t the last sentence too much like raising a flag?

But he also became aware of a major mistake he had made, which was, that his intelligence control within the Longsong Stronghold was too weak – if it weren’t for the messenger sent by Petrov, he would only become aware of the enemy after it had already hit his door. Once a street fight broke out, the First Army would lose its advantage of firepower, and it would be difficult to get the advantage back.

I’m too young, too simple, Roland thought, after the war, this has to be changed, not only our intelligence system, Petrov should also be placed in my own staff.

In the following time, Roland sat restlessly at his table, even when it was time for lunch he wasn’t in the mood to eat. Only when Lighting, carrying Nightingale, flew in a fairy like manner into his room was he able to breath out in relieve.

Maggie closed her wings, dropped on Nightingales shoulders and chirped in a high voice: “Doesn’t exist goo, doesn’t exist goo!”

“They have no God’s Stone of Retaliation?”

“Most of them don’t possess them,” Nightingale said, taking off her hood, freeing her golden flood. “I have observed them from the front to the end, and I could only detect three to four black holes from the ranks of the militia.”

“Very well,” Roland said, immediately forming a preliminary battle plan. “You all should be hungry by now. In that case, go to the dining hall and order whatever you want to eat from the chef.

“Honey-sauce barbecue, Goo!” Maggie chirped, spread her wing and flew ahead.

East of Border Town.

Van’er glanced at the stone masons and workers who were busying themselves at both sides of the road, “In the end, what is it that they are building?”

In the beginning hundreds of people had dug out several huge pits in the ground, and they then built a brick wall at the edge of the pits, he thought that the walls would be connected, cutting off the road this way, so he never expected that they would actually be built around the pit.

"Don't worry about it; I only know that there is finally another enemy we can beat," Jop said excitedly while setting up the cannon on the right spot.

Indeed, how satisfying that would be. Last time when we had defeated the Duke's coalition, His Royal Highness had personally awarded us members of the artillery group with a bronze emblem... No, that's wrong; it was a medal. The Longsong Stronghold's wall was depicted on the front of the medal, while the back was engraved with the year and their accomplishment. It was an exquisite production and had led to a lot of envy from the others within the firearm squadron.

And as if that wasn't already enough honor, they had also been promoted, Van'er was now an artillery captain, and was in charge of ten artillery groups. The Rodney brothers, Cat Claws and Jop, were promoted to team captains, with three of them transferred to newly formed groups, where they were in charge to teaching the newly enlisted gunners how to operate the cannon.

However, the most inspiring was, that the Prince, His Highness has honored his promise, and had assigned a piece of land, which laid east of the town, at the foot of the Impassable Mountain Range, to him. Even though it was only a forest for now, but on the ground there now stood a stele, symbolizing that this piece and the rights to its use belonged to him.

So when they had learned that an enemy wanted to invade Border Town, the First Army suddenly began to boil, everyone was fully motivated, and hoped to gain some merits within the battle.

When the evening came, and the day's drill finally came to its end, Van'er wiped the sweat from his forehead, and sat down on the shelves to take a little rest. During the whole afternoon he had gone from one artillery group to another, checking whether the new recruits were following the rules and execution steps when firing, he had yelled so much that his throat was nearly on fire.

"Drink something," Jop handed him a leather flask.

"Thank you," Van'er twisted open the lid, drinking thirstily.

"I think I know what they're going to build," said the former, raising his lips, proudly.

"Is that so?" He gave the leather bag back to Jop. By now the brick wall has been piled up to half a person's height, roughly surrounding the pit in a hexagon. However, on each side of the wall, 30 – 40 centimeters over the ground, they had left open a long and narrow cross, which slightly resembled a window but appeared to be a bit smaller. "It won't be a house."

"Calling it a house, wouldn't be wrong, I just went and asked a mason," Job nodded, "he told me that this was something His Royal Highness, the Prince had come up with, when the firearm team hides themselves within they can fire while being half buried in the ground, not having to worry about anything. But they also have a unique name; His Royal Highness called it a bunker."

Chapter 198 - The Sudden Opening

Three days passed quickly, and the construction of the defense line had finally ended.

Roland stood on a stage far behind the front line, the same way he had done when they repelled the demonic beast during the Months of Demons. Today, he once again went to the battlefield in person in order to inspire all of the officers and soldiers of the First Army.

Due to having a special task, Nightingale had already snuck onto the battlefield, and took Echo along with her. Because of this, it was Anna who stood at his side this time and took over Nightingale's protection duty.

Roland himself wore a coated armor together with two revolvers fastened at his waist. However, as long as the defensive line didn't totally fall apart, allowing a rushing enemy to pass through like a fish that was escaping the net, it would be awfully difficult for the enemy to pose a threat to him.

"Currently the enemy is about ten kilometers away from here, Goo!" a giant pigeon informed him as it descended from the sky and landed on his shoulder.

"Well done, keep watching," Roland took a piece of beef jerky from his pocket and passed it to Maggie's mouth. Within two or three pecks she had swallowed down the whole jerky, then once more opened her wings and rose into the sky, flying eastwards.

With Lightning and Maggie taking turns investigating, Roland had a clear picture of the enemy's movements this whole time, allowing him to set the battlefield comfortably to his liking.

When dealing with crazy drugged warriors, confronting them in a line formation wasn't safe. He was especially taking extra care after Lightning's report that several hundreds of them were wearing short spears. If he wasn't wrong, then it was likely that the spears would be used as pre-emptive weapons.

Generally the range of throwing weapons shouldn't be longer than 50 meters, however, this was only the case for ordinary people. But, how far they could throw them after taking the pills, Roland wasn't sure of either. If they could reach further than 100 meters, they would become a threat to the firearm team. Because of that, he had chosen to put down a number of bunkers, and implementing urban tactics. By constructing a barricade, letting the guns stopping them from coming closer, and an artillery barrage as support, he had built an insurmountable line of defense.

Under the current situation of having a sufficient amount of cement, it was easier to quickly construct some bunkers than construct the city wall. Furthermore, the bunkers were only a building with a monolayer of bricks, making it somewhat fragile, but for the militia who weren't using heavy siege equipment, that should still be an unbreakable fortification.

Ten bunkers forming a rhombus were built on each side of the road, forming a crossfire zone. Each bunker was stationed with twenty-four soldiers, half of whom were veterans with the other

half being recruits. The experienced veterans were responsible for shooting; while the recruits were responsible for loading ammunition. Lastly, Soraya had also drawn an “optical camouflage” for the bunker. So that as long as someone was looking from a distance, the bunker would become interspersed into the surrounding environment, making it difficult to distinguish the difference between the two.

Behind the frontline there stood the artillery unit. The twenty cannons were lined up and would follow the same firing sequence as last time, adjusting the firing angle and filling the corresponding ammunition according to Lightning’s signals.

At the side of artillery positions there also stood an emergency force, with about 100 people, equipped with flintlock guns, whose only task was to protect the artillery unit and the Prince, His Royal Highness who was standing behind them.

Watching the line of defense and seeing the soldiers with their high morale and their spirits trembling with excitement, within his heart, Roland was deeply moved. The army, at first extremely weak and fragile, built out of people who only enrolled into the military with the purpose of having an egg to eat; after going through the baptism of the Months of Demons and the defense battle, now stood side by side, proudly wearing on their shoulders the responsibility of defending their home.

“Your Highness, right now the enemy is only two kilometers away from us,” Lightning, reported as she returned.

“Very well, the surveillance task will be fully handed over to

Maggie; you instead will have to go into the woods and issue the signals for the artillery.” Roland nodded, then turned to the Chief Knight and said, “Pass my order, all members of the First Army should enter their alert position and prepare to welcome the enemy!”

“Yes!” Carter saluted.

Lehman felt it as his hand became harder and harder to move.

Two days ago he had constantly felt a burning pain, but by now he had almost lost all feelings in his arm. He could no longer put his armor over his swollen greenish blue arm. At the place where the iron hammer had hit his arm, it had left behind a blackish red mark, at first glance it looked like a somewhat transparent yet shiny layer was laid over his skin.. .

The bone must be broken, he thought, if I don’t treat it soon, this arm won’t be preserved. The analgesic drugs we found in the church can alleviate the pain, but they cannot regenerate a broken bone. He decided to wait until the end of the battle before he would immediately return to King’s City, where he would go find the best pharmacists and alchemists in the whole Kingdom of Graycastle. They ought to be able to cure this damned internal injury I have.

“Sir Lehman, your hand... is it really alright?” Levin asked concerned.

“It just looks a bit scary,” he pretended to be indifferent. “Let’s put it off until after we’ve attacked Border Town, for now, the town still isn’t in our hands, so we should keep our concentration focused on that task.”

“I hope the pain in your arm didn’t make you head muzzy, Sir,” Duane sneered. “How do you want to attack the town?”

The tone the other Knight spoke with made Lehman frown, but now wasn’t the time to care about such a small matter.

“According to the news we were able to gather from the nobles of the Wolf and Elk Family, they mainly relied on a long-range offensive weapon to curb the Knights. This kind of weapon could attack the Knights before their charge reached them. Furthermore, when used they are accompanied by a flame and a loud noise. All in all they are similar to a huge ballista, which can throw objects at a much faster speed than a crossbow arrow.”

“In other words, despite its power, it cannot continuously fire, right?” Levin quickly seized the key point.

“Yes, the faster we are able to reach their defense, the fewer attacks we will have to face,” Lehman nodded, “in addition, the number of people is also crucial. As far as I know, Duke Ryan and his coalition of nobles all together only had 200 Knights, and in the end, they only missed the chance to break through by a final step. However, we possess more than 1500 people, who, after taking the pills aren’t any slower than a running horse, so our result will be entirely differently than the last attempt.”

“Or all that will never happen,” Duane thought otherwise, “Perhaps Roland Wimbledon is still sitting in his castle, waiting for the arrival of the envoy. So, as long as we relaxedly enter the castle, we can just go and chop off his head.”

“No, by now he definitely has noticed us,” Lehman categorically denied this option, “Didn’t you discover that within the last three days we hadn’t come across any caravan? That the merchants in Longsong Stronghold, after seeing our large unit chose to either stay or return to the stronghold isn’t strange, but that we hadn’t seen any caravan coming from Border Town is unusual. The only explanation for this is that the Prince must have sealed Border Town off.”

“Do you finally understand why his Majesty chose Sir Lehman to be captain instead of you?” Levin asked mockingly.

“Well, it looks like you have no problem with your head,” Duane just shrugged his shoulders. “This way it’s quite good. Compared with merely killing the Prince by myself, it will be more interesting to kill all of those outcasts who dare to rebel against His Majesty Timothy.”

“Sir Lehman, we have discovered soldiers and horses in front of Border Town,” the investigating Cavalier reported.

“Alright, let’s go and have a look,” Lehman pushed his horse forward. At this point the castle’s outline had become faintly visible and at the end of the road he could see some shadows busy

walking. Pulling out his observation mirror, he carefully observed the arrangement of the enemy's defensive line, "Those things with the wheels, according to our intelligence they should be the long-range attack weapons, but their number seem to be much greater than was reported."

"Should we have everyone rush madly at them?" Levin asked.

"This road is a bit narrow, I am afraid that it can't accommodate the whole militia," he looked at the woods to the right of him, "We should branch off some people and let them circle around, even though they will be slower, but that won't matter. As long as we are able to start a flank attack, their defensive line won't be able to last for long."

The moment Lehman was preparing to give his commands to adjust his army, he suddenly caught a touch of white from the corner of his eyes.

Being startled, he stared blankly, is this... a hallucination caused by my broken arm? Impossible, it actually is a woman. The woman was wearing a hood, her whole body was covered with a white robe, and even faster than he was able to open his mouth to shout, a flame suddenly appeared from her hands.

Lehman only felt how his head suddenly got hit by a force similar to the hammer, before the world began to spin and he fell into darkness.

Chapter 199 - Chaos Of War

“Everyone charge!” Almost at the same time, Lehman’s voice sounded out loudly.

Levin stared disbelievingly at Lehman Hawes who had suddenly fallen from his horse. The back of his head was completely blown away, revealing a red and white sticky paste from within. His helmet laid broken to the side, blooming with a big hole at its top, showing that it had not had any protective effect.

“Charge, everyone, to me!” Then Levin’s voice also rang out.

No, they both hadn’t spoken! Levin covered his mouth, looking behind him, he saw the militia wasn’t waiting, they immediately swallowed the pills and began to rush, just like a flood of people coming towards him.

It’s a witch. He realized that a witch had imitated his voice. “Do not charge, cease!” He shouted out as loudly as he could.

However, within the excited crowd his voice didn’t spread very far, the few people who had heard his cry stopped, but even more continued charging forward.

“Hurry, quickly attack, try to break through the center of the enemy’s defense line, everyone who reaches the town is allowed to plunder!” It wasn’t just his voice, Duane’s and the voices of the other Knight’s also sounded out, one after another, as if all of this was by prior arrangement. Moreover, the witch’s voice

overshadowed all the other noises, as if it was being directly created next to his ear.

Within the militia, there were also many voices bursting out, as if in line with their commands, the crowd began to shout out “looting” slogans. Levin didn’t know who had started it, but soon the slogans rang throughout all of the ranks. The situation had completely gone beyond his control, Levin didn’t try to shout any more commands, they would just be drowned in the excited roars of the crowd anyway. Instead, he had to fully concentrate on controlling his horse, in order to avoid getting himself pulled away by the mighty current. And as if they have lost all reason, the militia rushed towards the center of the road.

No, that wasn’t right. From the very beginning they had already lost all reason, especially in the case of someone else guiding them. After they took the drugs they became totally euphoric, and with the thought of killing and looting they got even further stimulated. In the beginning, the first people had still tried to avoid stepping on the fallen Lehman, but the people after didn’t care any longer, and directly stepped onto the corpse.

Levin wanted to meet up with Duane and the other Knights, only to discover that they had been scattered all over the place by the flood of people. Under these compelling circumstances, he would first have to go along with the stream of people, and gradually try to lead his horse to the woods at the side. In case he decided to turn his horse directly, it was only a matter of time before he would be knocked down by the strength enforced militia, and if he then wanted to get up again, it would be nearly impossible.

From within the ranks, Levin was looking all over the place, trying to find the witch responsible for causing the chaos, wanting to chop her in 1000 pieces. In his view, this definitely had to be the doing of a witch!

The 1500 people who had eaten the pill are rushing into the direction of the Prince's defense line, for the Prince this wave has to be a deadly attack. Even if the other side had now more of the new weapons, it still won't be enough to go against so many people at once, for that guy, the result of this won't be much better. A situation where both sides have to suffer a loss, is obviously something the witches will be jubilant about, this was also the reason why they had infiltrated our ranks and caused so much trouble, luring our army to advance forward of their own initiative.

"The witch who killed Lehman and the witch who created the chaos can't be the same person," Levin let his gaze wander over the few people who still stood at his side, they had previously stood at the front and had witnessed the fall of Lehman, furthermore, later they had also heard him calling for a stop. But they couldn't be compared with the huge army of before, even if they gathered, they still couldn't reach 30 people, "One of the witches has the ability to hide her body and the other one can manipulate her voice. After all, a witch cannot have two abilities, go and find the latter, I want to tear out her throat!"

...

Through the shooting window, Brian could see how the enemy steadily came closer. From the bunkers at the forefront even the

first gunfire could be heard.

His defensive position was at the middle of the diamond. Because of this, he had to wait until the enemy passed the purple marks at the side of the road. Having to wait so long before he can fire made him very anxious.

To do something else, he went to the window on the other side, there Brian could look at the defense line further behind. From the artillery positions white smoke was unceasingly rising up, and with it, a thunder-like roar rolled over the battlefield. They are once again the first to become busy, with their 12-pounder they can almost cover the entire battlefield. As long as he listened carefully, he could even hear the screams of the shells as they flew through the air.

“Oh my God, they are running so fast!”

“Look at that fellow, his hand was torn off by a shell, yet he is still running forward.”

“What His Highness said was true, can they still be called human? They are simply the same as demonic beasts.”

Because the First Army was already informed during the pre-battle mobilization, of the enemy having taken the Church's berserker pills, they didn't become scared when they saw the enemy's continued attack even under a hail of bullets; instead they were full of fighting spirit, after all, they were the First Army, who got forged under the flames of demonic beasts.

“Captain, they are coming!” Someone warned.

Hearing the call, Brian quickly returned to his position, took a revolver rifle next to the window and began loading it. Compared to the old weapons, His Highness’ new version had a simple improvement. Now, within a breath he could already fire off five rounds of bullets, then he could just throw the cartridge towards the recruit standing behind him, take the five extra rounds and fire them off, while the recruit would have reloaded his previous cartridge.

However, during the training, His Highness had stressed that only when the enemy had stepped into the range of 100 to 50 meters, were they allowed to use this kind of shooting. While for long-range shooting they had to aim to be as accurate as possible, because the manufacturing the bullets of revolver rifles was very troublesome, everyone’s amount of rounds were limited.

Brian deeply believed that the shells which contained the gunpowder –with their slender front and thick back, and their, and their almost always similar form– absolutely couldn’t have been created by a blacksmith. He knew that such a fine and delicate work had to have come from the hands of a witch.

Usually, after the shooting exercise, they would collect all their cartridge cases and hand them over to Iron Axe. Shooting practice was generally followed with a reloading exercise, during which they would sit as a group in the center of the camp.

To assemble the used cartridges into a new bullet, they had to follow strict operating guidelines. First, they had to push the primer to the bottom, followed by filling it up with gunpowder, then finally inserting the projectile. Due to the exercises, he was reluctant to consume his ammunition carelessly, in case the target was too hard to hit.

The moment the enemy crossed the purple marker, Brian took a deep breath, then finally shouted, “Fire at will!”

The soldier that have been waiting for this order for a very long time, enthusiastically aimed at an easy target and start pulling the trigger. Suddenly, the bunker became flooded with the sound of the gunfire. The first enemy to cross the line was hit by bullets from both sides, which caused blood to splash from his waist, after staggering two steps forward, he fell to the ground. It was obviously that they could suffer through more pain than ordinary people, but in the face of heavy-caliber bullets, this still didn’t matter.

Brian noticed that several people had jumped on the top of the frontmost bunkers, wanting to sneak attack the soldiers who were inside from the back, but they were blocked out by a thick iron gate. Not hesitating, he pulled the trigger, killing off the madmen who were exposing their bodies to him one after the other. The reason why the bunkers were arranged in a diamond formation, was so that that they could help with defending one another, enemies who wanted to bypass the first row and attack from behind would be shot to death by the rearmost bunkers.

“Be careful, they’ve thrown out their spears!” Someone suddenly

shouted.

Brian noticed how a dense shadow rose up from the center of the enemy's army, after passing its apex, they began to fall upon the bunkers that were on both sides of the road.

At such a distance, they have to cover two or three hundred meters! He subconsciously lowered his head into the pit, only to hear the sound of a series of cracking sounds from the top. After this wave of attacks had come to its end, he stood up straight and discovered that not one of those spears had been able to penetrate the bunker. Looking at the bunker in front, he saw that their situation was similar; only a few spears had been able to insert themselves into the wall, like some lonely feathers.

"Even if it's looks very scary, it is still useless," everyone began to roaring with laughter.

At this moment, Brain saw one enemy who disregarded all dangers, and threw up several splashes of earth in his forward charge towards their bunker. Then the enemy bent over and threw his spear in a flat curve, and at the very moment the spear left his arm, he was nailed down by an intense hail of bullets.

"Down!" Even before his warning shout could entirely leave his throat, the thrown spear already passed through the shooting window, and pierced the chest of a shooter, the latter issued a stuffy groan and then fell face up, towards the ground.

Chapter 200 - Hunters And Prey

“Freckle!” Someone shouted, “He’s injured!”

“Do not move him!” Brian roared, “I’ll go and take a look at his injury, you continue shooting.”

He put his rifle in the hands of the recruit at his side, the one who was responsible for loading, and lowered his waist to approach the injured soldier. The wounded, who still hadn’t lost his consciousness, asked in a trembling voice, “Captain, I... am I going to die?”

The short spear had pierced him at the lower pit of the stomach, it was unclear if it had gone through, however, seeing that his breath still seemed to be flowing freely, the spear must not have punctured his lung. During culture class, His Royal Highness had briefly described the various organs of the human body and which measures were to be taken in the case of an injury. The best solution Brian could think of at the moment, was to remain here and wait until the end of the fight, then allow for Miss Nana to come over and treat him.

“Does it hurt?” Brian asked.

Freckles nodded with difficulty.

“Since you can still feel pain it means you won’t die,” to reassure the Knight, he put his hand on Freckle’s forehead. “You should know about Miss Nana ‘s ability, right?”

“Uhhn,” With difficulty, Freckles was able to show a smile. “During times of peace, everyone... wants to go see her, putting it that way, I... I, I can finally see her, now.”

“That’s right! Therefore you have to persevere.”

When Brian returned to his shooting window, the recruit turned towards him and asked concerned. “Why didn’t you pull the spear out?”

“By pulling it out it is likely that instead of helping, it could cause massive bleeding, later in class you will also learn about this, and then everything will become clear,” he paused. “The best we can now do for him, is to defeat the enemy as quickly as possible.”

...

Standing on his heightened stage, Roland could clearly see the enemy rushing like a tide towards the town.

The moment they crossed the first row of bunkers, their speed slowed down a lot, by the time they reached the third row of bunkers, the enemy’s flanks were fully exposed to riflemen’s crossfire.

Echo’s task was quite obvious, even though the enemy’s force was stretched into a long line, most of them still acted in accordance with her unceasingly issued “concentrated charge”

command, rushing along the road.

Every moment there were a lot of their people falling, and they couldn't do anything about it. Having to face up against a fortification they couldn't destroy with their spears and swords, Timothy's militia force could do nothing except endure the casualties they faced and continue pushing forward.

After they passed the third row of bunkers, they crossed the 300 meters mark, which meant that now the cannons would now be loaded with canister shells. Among the gunner's, stepping into this area was also known as entering into the death zone.

In the sky, Lightning had replaced her flag with one in bright red.

The angle of the 20 cannons were lying flat, their front spit out flames and thick smoke. Roland had roughly estimated, that the most skilled artillery group would be able to release one shrapnel shot every twenty seconds, while the slowest would needed around 30 seconds. At first glance, it seemed that they came close to the rate of fire of the best artillery groups during the American Civil War, but the latter's three shots per minute were performed with solid shells, for which they had to clean the cannon repeatedly and aim it at the target once more. However, canister shells could be fired without aiming, and the cannon also didn't need to be wiped, so it was only natural that the rate of fire would be fast.

For the enemy, such a rate of fire was terrible news. Furthermore, the canister shells' kill and injure-rate without even aiming was especially astonishing, almost every iron bullet would

penetrate two to three people. Although after taking the pill they could withstand a great deal of pain, the pills couldn't also suppress fear.

When seeing how the people around them were slaughtered one after another, even if they were totally excited and thirsted after massacre, they were unable to suppress their body's instinctual fear of death. Even more, they originally hadn't been a iron-willed force, without their pills, these people were just a group of untrained, civilians lacking in true practical combat experience. When half of their force laid out on the road, the enemy began to flee.

Like a plague the fear quickly spread, what began with one person was soon followed by a second then a third, until the forefront eventually completely stopped with its assault, and instead wholly started to turn around and flee. Once again the artillery regiment changed their ammunition to solid bullets, aiming at the center of the road, while the whole time the bunkers had never ceased in their shooting.

Creating a pile of corpses laid on top of the road.

...

As Levin's raging heart gradually cooled down, a feeling of fear began to grow within him.

In the beginning, more than 20 people had set out and discovered the witch wearing strange clothes, who created the chaos, hiding

within the forest, almost perfectly integrating with the surrounding scenery. If she hadn't moved forward along with the main force, always guiding the people to cram themselves together at the middle of the road, it would have been almost impossible for them to detect her.

Even after they had discovered her, she still caused considerable trouble to Levin. He found out that she didn't need her mouth to imitate the voices and even more the sound drifted around without an anchored source. Sometimes, it was coming from the left, other times it would come from the right, and at times even came from behind him. The content was also varied, such as imitating his accent and giving orders or sending out a distressed call for help from a fellow militiamen.

But when they wanted to close in and seize her, the woman dressed in white appeared again.

Seeing her, Levin recalled the shocking scene of her killing Lehman Hawes.

In her hand she was grasping a silver-white "light crossbow", and the moment she sent out a spark, with a loud bang, another person would fall.

The surrounding encirclement was instantaneously torn into shreds, all of them suddenly turning into frightened birds.

My armor doesn't offer any protection, and using a shield also doesn't work, the iron shield tied to Levin's arm had been broken

in half, seeing the hole in the metal told him how powerful that weapon really was.

I'm afraid the only weapon that can match up with this power is a heavy crossbow. If he hadn't subconsciously lowered his head, he would have already become a corpse by now.

But a heavy crossbow can't be fired off in succession!

With her hiding ability and her unrivaled weapon, Levin realized that they stood no chance of winning. The moment he became aware of this it felt as if he had met with a cold wind, his burning rage was quickly extinguished.

“Take the pills and kill her the moment she appears!”

Even though his mouth called to attack, Levin himself retreated, planning on running into the woods the moment she put her focus on the militia.

No, it should be even safer to stay within the large group, she will never dare attack me when I'm inside the crowd!

Furthermore, this forest seemed to have grown very strange, the thick weeds almost reaching to my knees, covering the vines below, as if they want to tripp me. When he finally was able to stumble out of the woods, Levin looked toward the front, wanting to hide within the large group, yet the scene in front of him left him stunned.

The drug efficacy shouldn't have come to its end, so why are they... retreating? No that's not right, it should be said that they are running away. Those who move too slow or haven't responded have been mercilessly pushed to the ground and later trampled on. Previous during the charge they ran as fast as horses, but now with the escape it was the same, during their raging flight they were throwing dust into the sky. Seeing such a situation, he did not dare to come close to in the attempt to stop them.

In the end, what happened? Levin was unable to process the situation, in such a short time, how was it possible to entirely defeat the 1500 people? Even more, since all of them had taken those pills! Are the Prince's men actually monsters?

At this moment, from behind him, the sound of someone stepping on weeds could be heard. Gritting his teeth, Levin suddenly drew his sword and stabbed with it behind himself. At this critical moment of life and death, his quick drawing technique was faster than ever before, like a flash of lightning. Nevertheless, he was still greeted by a dazzling flame. His blade was hit by something, sending sparks flying, and stabbing into his hand, instantly erasing the feelings from his fingertips.

When he moved his line of sight towards his arm, Levin saw that half of his arm was missing, exposing red and white muscles and bones, like a flower in full bloom. The woman in white looked at him with a blank expression. Unable to confront her, he couldn't help but back up several steps, tripping over a weed.

The moment he laid still, the witch placed her foot on his

shoulder and pressed her cold weapon against his forehead. From his perspective on the ground, Levin could see the face hidden under the hood.

So... beautiful.

Was his final thought as the gunshot rang out.